

Eynsham Parish Plan 2007-08

53 ENVIRONMENT

53.1 The Facts

53.1.1 Eynsham's environmental challenges begin with its location, at an important crossing of the river Thames, midway between Oxford and Witney and within a stone's throw of the A40. For 20 years the eastern bypass filtered commuter traffic away from the village centre. But the infrastructure has not developed to match demand: Swinford Toll bridge is now a notorious bottleneck and early morning traffic in the village often tails back to the Market Square. More details appear in the Transport/Traffic section 56. Parking issues, which generate equally strong feeling, are discussed in section 53.2 below.



Illustration 1: Traffic tailback along Oxford Road, September 2006

There are several positive stories too, owing much to specific grants and Parish Council support, but also to the enthusiasm and hard work of volunteers.

53.1.2 Eynsham Wood to the north of the A40 was a Millennium project, championed by the Eynsham Society and supported by the Woodland Trust. These 13 acres – part of the ancient Wychwood Forest – were planted with native broad-leaved species, adding paths and glades, signs and seats to increase public enjoyment. The saplings are already forming young trees and the site is beginning to shape up to the vision.



Illustration 2: Eynsham Wood - a Woodland Trust Initiative

53.1.3 The Abbey Fishponds site to the south is considerably more accessible and already well-used. The Parish Council is restoring the area with a variety of partners, to protect its past and enhance its biodiversity. The most recent grant, from Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment, will create a large area of open, shallow water and much improved habitat for various invertebrates, amphibians and bird life – and a major recreation resource for villagers and visitors alike.

53.1.4 Footpaths and Bridleways: Thanks to Oxfordshire County Council's definitive map and statement of public rights of way, published in February 2006, Eynsham is well placed to collaborate in the Improvement Plan. The Parish Council has converted the Statement into a parish map, now available online, and is making an inventory of problems such as broken stiles and gates, missing sign-posts and impassable vegetation.

When the audit is complete it will be passed on to OCC with a request for the repairs to be implemented.



Illustration 3: Sue Chapman and the Eynsham Morris open the circular walk, 1994



Illustration 4: Rights of Way 'Now' – mud and cattle on the way to Eynsham Lock, 2006

53.1.5 The Allotment Fields on the eastern fringe are another popular resource, with rarely a single plot available for rent¹. Recent work on the boundaries, funded by the Parish Council, has given due weight to environmental considerations. The phased layering of the hedge between the two fields and along the perimeter is a work of art, of which plot holders are justly proud.

53.1.6 Within the Village, open spaces have consistently been planted with trees and shrubs, though some of the mature trees are becoming dangerous (possibly accelerated by heat and drought in 2006) and have been felled in the last 12 months. A professional survey of St Leonard's churchyard in May 2006 found 45 trees, of which 4 were a potential risk, and advised remedial work on one third of the remainder. Smaller open areas, such as the grounds surrounding older houses, are unfortunately disappearing as “infill” and front gardens regularly lose out to hard standing as plots diminish in size. On the other hand, verges and footpaths are often managed imaginatively, with rose beds, self-sown seedlings and spring bulbs cropping up in unexpected places; the verge beside Old Witney Road play area is the latest possibility. There are also occasional opportunities for sensitive restoration, as with the area behind St Leonard's Church Hall.



Illustration 5: Allotments – collective clear-up after layering of boundary hedges, February 2007

¹ There were 12 people on the waiting list at the time of writing

- 53.1.7 The Primary School Grounds Project, fostered by the European Eco-Schools Programme and the County Council OSCAs scheme, demonstrates the value of starting young. Students have already set up compost bins, created a tree nursery and made a willow dome, put up bird and bat boxes, planted flower beds and a vegetable patch (including potato towers from old tyres). They are also sharing “green” ideas with other schools and have ambitious plans for further work².



Illustration 6: Primary School Grounds Project - willow arbor

53.2 Environment: The Opinions

- 53.2.1 Question 19 found that traffic reduction was top priority for improving Eynsham's environment (435 votes: 59%). Free-form responses expanded on this, with strong views on the number of vehicles parked in the village as well as the volume of traffic.
- 53.2.2 Back Lane car park is an under-used resource. It is not clearly sign-posted from approaching roads and traffic flow is restricted by residents' cars. However, increased use might conflict with existing arrivals at the rear entrance of Bartholomew school.
- 53.2.3 Terraced properties in the village centre – Mill Street, Acre End and the Square – generally have no off-street parking, so residents vie with commuters and with people coming into the village to work for the limited on-street parking.
- 53.2.4 On-street parking in Acre End and High Street has created “pinch points” where heavy lorries and buses often make the narrow south side pavement hazardous for pedestrians.
- 53.2.5 Bike parking racks were suggested outside the Spar.
- 53.2.6 Question 17 looked at environmental services. 98% of respondents thought the refuse collection service good or reasonable but the figure dropped to 68% for roadside care/ street cleaning.
- 53.2.7 Question 18 found that at least 50% of respondents wanted to see more litter picking and more litter bins – in spite of the Parish Council's supplementary funding for these services.
- 53.2.8 Specific complaints included:



Illustration 7: Refuse and recycling on Acre End Street, December 2006

2 Further contributions appear at section 58.3.6

- i. Litter outside shops
- ii. Bottles, paper and uneaten food scattered over foot paths and playing fields
- iii. Dog fouling
- iv. Spillage from passing vehicles along the A40

53.2.9 Some comments were directed at young people coming into the village at lunch time. Suggested sites for more litter bins and dog waste bins included the path from Spareacre Lane to the A40.

53.2.10 Positive attitudes to recycling were reinforced by views that the current programme should extend to a wider range of items (e.g. community composting: 37%). However, the facilities in Back Lane car park can barely cope with existing volumes, especially in holiday periods. When the bins become full, recycled material left beside them can be scattered around the car park by wind or by vandals.

53.2.11 Question 12 looked at playing fields and play areas. While respondents were generally satisfied with these, free-form comments suggested the facilities in Oxford Road north side play area could do with extending and updating. This supports the Parish Council's plans to upgrade the Witney Road play area and install youth shelters in both fields.

53.2.12 Maintenance of hedges, ditches, footpaths, walls and open spaces were all viewed as environmentally important (Question 19). One of the highest votes went to footpaths and bridleways (645 respondents: 86%). Not so many people thought current maintenance levels were good or reasonable (Question 17 – footpaths 47.9%, bridleways 34.8%).

53.2.13 654 respondents to Question 19 (87%) felt that more resources should be focused on cleaning up local rivers and streams. The Wharf Stream is included in the Vision section 53.3 below, with more detail in the Leisure section (55.3).

53.2.14 Free-form responses raised other concerns and fears; the commonest are outlined here. Additional gravel extraction on the village outskirts might bring additional heavy goods traffic; dust and noise; another potentially unused lake; and possible future land-fill use.

53.2.15 Any significant housing development could bring more parking problems; additional traffic queues; loss of or erosion of open land and conservation areas; and further strain on existing environmental services.

53.2.16 Pavements were frequently described as unsafe, “hideous” or “appalling” and unsuitable for wheel chairs and buggies. Reduced funding for maintenance of roads and footways in Eynsham has already worked through into unsightly holes in the streets and widespread breaking away of curbstones.



Illustration 8: Footways were described as 'appalling' and 'very bad for wheelchair users'

53.3 Environment: The Vision

53.3.1 Reduction in land-fill rates is a key environmental challenge and West Oxfordshire has made good progress in this direction.

“A record-breaking amount of household waste ... was recycled in October. Latest recycling figures show that 27.34 per cent of household waste was recycled and composted, the highest amount ever recorded in the District.”³

53.3.2 Proposals for reducing the frequency of bin collection are more contentious, as food waste left on or near the street for two weeks could represent a health hazard. “Future technologies” under consideration at county/regional level offer another way ahead, with a major composting plant proposed at Worton Farm (Oxford Times 9 February 2007). The system is already in use in Edmonton, north London, within 50 meters of housing.

53.3.3 Development of the area around Eynsham Lock emerged as a common theme in comments and discussion. The various strands include:

- i. a sustainable landscape scheme involving coppiced woodland, managed water levels and a better environment for fish spawning – OCC/Environment Agency (under discussion)
- ii. boating/fishing tuition at the Lock
- iii. clearing the Wharf Stream to enable small craft to reach the Thames from the historic trading point beside the Talbot Inn. “Currently it is clogged with fallen willows, eroded embankments, weeds and brambles.”
- iv. putting up a Rights of Way map at Eynsham Lock.



Illustration 9: The Wharf Stream