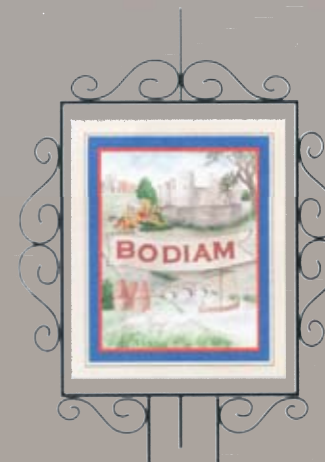


# Bodiam



## Local Action Plan



# Parish Action Plan 2008 ►

## Bodiam Action Plan

Bodiam Action Plan has been produced by the Action Plan Group on behalf of the residents of Bodiam. The idea for each Rother Parish to have an Action Plan was promoted, and has been supported by, Rother District Council. The first step in Bodiam was a presentation at the Parish Assembly in 2005. A public meeting organised by the Parish Council followed in July 2006 and the Group was formed shortly afterwards.

The priorities and resulting actions contained in the plan have been arrived at through analysis of the questionnaire delivered to all households in June 2007; 33% of the population on the electoral roll at the time completed the forms. There was also an opportunity for young people and school pupils to contribute through their own questionnaires.

The full analysis is not contained in this document, but is available through the Parish Council.

The Plan will be forwarded to Rother District Council to be taken into account in the plans for the District. It will give weight to requests for change, or for the conservation of



those things in our community which we value. Although the Plan can only provide a picture of the preferences and concerns of residents at one time, it should also be a live document containing actions to be implemented, and to be built on in the future. We hope that the people of Bodiam will want to take part in helping to achieve this.



# Background

Bodiam is a small parish (649 hectares) lying between the north bank of the river Rother and the Kent Ditch in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. There are 150 households, the main concentration of population being in Levetts Lane. The first Parish Council meeting, which lasted for forty-five minutes, was held in the National School room on December 4th 1894, when five councillors and a District Councillor were elected. Present day meetings last considerably longer and are held in the Parish Room, which is provided by the Parker Ashcombe Trust. Other public buildings in the parish are St Giles' Church, Bodiam CE Primary School, Bodiam Manor School, the Castle Inn and Bodiam Castle, a National Trust property since 1925. Apart from the Castle and the Church, there are 15 listed buildings in the parish. The Castle attracts approximately 160,000 visitors a year to the village, some of them arriving on the Kent & East Sussex Railway trains, and a few on the tourist boat from Newenden, but the majority by road.

To see the boat arriving reminds us that the river was once a vital form of communication. There is evidence of settlements here from very early times, both iron age and Roman remains having been found. It is thought that the Roman road to Rochester crossed the Rother somewhere near present day Bodiam bridge, and that there was a river port on the south side at that time probably used for the export of iron ore.

In medieval times the manor house was probably on the hillside above the site of the Castle. However, in 1385, Sir Edward Dalyngrigge, the owner of the estate through marriage to Elizabeth, heiress of the Wardeux family, was granted a licence by King Richard II to "strengthen and crenellate" his manor "for defence of the countryside". Sir Edward had fought very successfully in the Hundred Years War in France with Sir Robert Knollys, and decided on a more strategic position near the river, which was navigable to Bodiam Bridge. Although there was a possible threat of invasion by the French via the river at this time, he seems to have wanted to combine providing defence of the realm

with having an imposing, comfortable residence that would impress the Court. He built the castle that we know today.

Unfortunately we do not know it as he and his family lived in it. At some time during the Civil War it was probably dismantled by Parliamentary forces, and was not rebuilt. Although the walls and towers remain, the interior is a shell. It was owned by a number of families in the intervening years, notably John Fuller who bought it in 1829 to prevent its demolition and George Cubitt, Lord Ashcombe, who purchased it in 1864 and began the first repair work. His son sold the property to Lord Curzon in 1916. Lord Curzon then undertook extensive excavation and restoration, and bequeathed the Castle and the estate to the National Trust on his death in 1925.

Today visitors can enjoy the Castle with its moat and wonderful reflections, and the grounds, included in which is a reminder of World War 2, in the form of a pill box which has recently been restored. This formed part of an inland line of defence against invasion.

For many years, most of the land apart from that owned by the National Trust in Bodiam was owned by Messrs Arthur Guinness, and cultivated for hops. Guinness farmed approximately two thousand acres in the local area for around 69 years from 1907 to 1976 and employed 90% of Bodiam adult residents. The hops were hand picked until the 1960's when picking machines were introduced. Guinness also started a dairy herd using land which was no longer suitable for hop growing.

It was decided to grow hops in Bodiam because of the micro climate and ready water supply. Surprisingly the amount of string used each year to string up the hops would stretch from Bodiam to New York. Levetts Lane was built for the employees and was jointly funded between the District Council and Guinness.

When the company sold the land in 1976, a great change of land use began, which continues to the present day and is reflected in this Action Plan.

## Bodiam Parish Church

The site of St Giles is an ancient place of worship. There is Anglo-Saxon stonework below the tower suggesting that the present building replaces an earlier Saxon church. Worship has continued here for over 1000 years. The main part of the present building dates from the 13th century and predates Bodiam Castle by over one hundred years.

Famous names from the Victorian age, Pugin, Cubitt and Carpenter refurbished and added to St Giles in the 19th

century. It is a matter for wonder that so many eminent craftsmen and designers glorified God through their contribution to this simple little church. There are six bells named after important names in Bodiam life: Guinness, Levett, Cottam, All Souls, St Giles, and Haile Selassie. Curious too that a church bell in this sleepy Sussex village is named after the Ethiopian Emperor who is worshipped as God by Rastafarians.

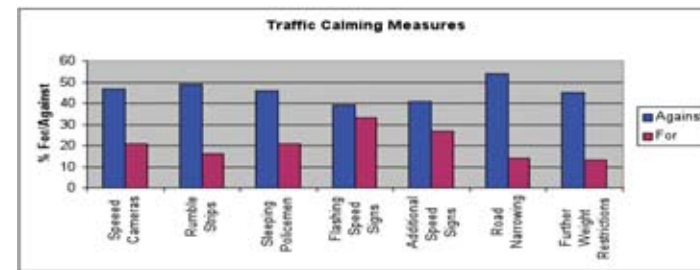


# Road safety and Parking

77% respondents felt that speeding in the area was an issue.

The concerns raised covered all areas of the Parish, but the hot spots were the junction at Bodiam Hill and Church Hill and particularly the area by the Schools and Parish Room, and the Sandhurst to Bodiam Road including the area surrounding the junction with Levett's Lane. Although not entirely in the Parish, speeding and visibility along the B2244 especially at the Curlew Junction continue to cause strong feeling.

63% felt that despite a possible increase in the rates, some sort of traffic calming measures would be a good idea, but there was no consensus on where or how this could be achieved.



## Parking

Some residents feel that there are parking problems in the village.

39% felt there were parking problems in Bodiam 47% felt there were no parking problems in Bodiam



The problem areas were identified as:-

1. The Primary School and Parish Room/Pre-School.
2. The area around the pub, the Green and the Castle.
3. Levett's Lane.
4. The Curlew Cross Roads when the pub is busy.

Suggestions for improving parking in the Village included:-

1. increasing the parking area for the Primary School by trying to purchase some unused land from the Bodiam Manor School.
2. in Levett's Lane possibly creating a car park on the old playground in the Lane and making use of unused corners of land.

## Street Lighting

90% of respondents were against installing any street lighting in the Parish, mainly on the grounds of light pollution.



# Transport

Public transport in the village consists of 1 bus service, the commuter railway stations of Etchingham and Robertsbridge some 5/6 miles away and the Kent and East Sussex (KESR) train service to Tenterden which predominately serves as a tourist attraction.

A high proportion of respondents, (in excess of 88%) have very few difficulties in respect of public transport arrangements for their employment, training, leisure or medical requirements. Only 3% stated that they have some problems attending medical appointments because they are unable to drive.

Both train and bus transport have very little usage, with only 15% making regular use of Etchingham, and just 2% using Robertsbridge stations. Similarly only 3% use the bus service regularly. This was blamed on impracticality and infrequency of services.

## Kent and East Sussex Railway

Whilst 60% stated that they have used the Bodiam/Tenterden line, this is predominantly for leisure activities. The 40% who have not used it gave the following reasons:-

- cost
- use car rather than train
- no time/interest
- intend to use in the future

If the line was extended from Bodiam to Robertsbridge 44% said they would make use of this line.



## Recommendations:

- Pursue more versatile ways of providing transport for the minority who occasionally require it
- Look at introducing a volunteer car scheme for medical appointments.

(15 % of respondents offered their services in this respect.)

In conclusion, very few people have problems with public transport but they are heavily dependent on their cars.

# Housing

Not entirely surprisingly only a small percentage of those questioned were looking for housing in the village (9%). Opinion was roughly evenly divided (53% against) on whether there was a need for more housing in the parish. A substantial majority (83%) thought that any new housing should be affordable/Housing Association, and there was some demand for sheltered housing for downsizing.

There was no support for large-scale developments, but some for single dwellings, groups of less than 10 houses and conversions of redundant buildings. A hearteningly large number (86%) thought that the Parish Council should have some input into the allocation of affordable housing especially where it was built specifically for local people.

There is a strong feeling that many village problems are exacerbated by placement of people in housing who have no desire to live in this relatively isolated rural village.



# Shops and Services

When asked what facilities should be provided in Bodiam, the principle demand was for a shop. 70% of respondents said they would support a community shop and 17 people were prepared to help run it.

95% of respondents felt that it is important for the village to have its own Church.

Surprisingly, 50% were satisfied with the service provided by our electricity supplier despite the continuing poor record of power cuts.

## Communications

The major source of village information is the Parish News, followed by word of mouth and the Parish notice boards. 74% think the Parish Council communicates well with the community but there is some demand for a newsletter and a website.

75% have access to a computer but nearly 50% complained about the poor quality and low capacity connection. 23% were interested in a computerized information point for the village.

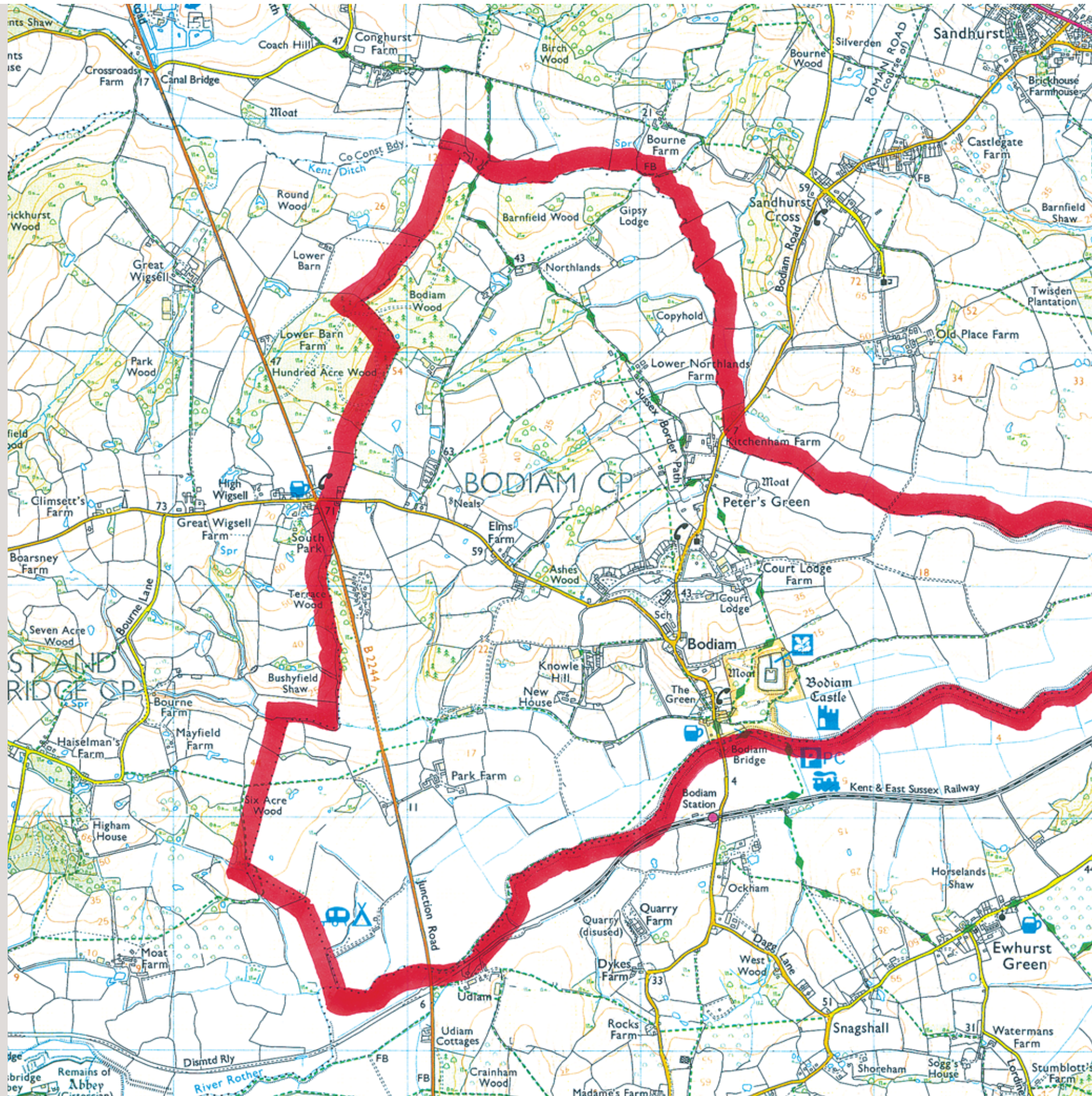
## Recycling

67% are aware of the mobile recycling point in the village and about half of these think the facility is adequate.

Despite a few concerns about litter, the vast majority feel that the village is in a tidy state.



The Mill House before 1907



## Crime and Safety

Fortunately almost 95% of those who replied to the questionnaire feel safe in the Parish. In fact, only 1 person claimed to feel unsafe – from fear of groups of youths.

12% had been the victims of crime over the past 2 years. The greatest problem identified being vandalism.

### Police Support Officers

Almost 60% are aware of their presence but many comments were made about their lack of visibility. There were calls for more visible policing and regular patrols. Only 1/3 are satisfied with the current policing level.

Only 20% are members of the e mail community contact, (Neighbourhood Watch)

### Suggestions for improvements:

- More regular police patrols, especially round the sports field.
- Install CCTV, especially on the pavilion.
- Increase community awareness - people looking out for each other – and reporting all crime especially vandalism.
- Try to increase the number of people involved in Neighbourhood Watch, via e mail Community Contact .



## Walking and Cycling

- Respondents indicated that they felt the footpaths in the village were well marked and accessible. (64% against 25%)
- 65% of respondents felt that no further footpaths or bridleways are required.
- There was felt a need for a footpath or a pavement from Bodiam Primary School to Blacksmith Field.
- Speed restrictions and/or traffic calming measures would make cycling and walking safer in the village.

Many expressed a wish for a footpath or pavement between Bodiam Primary School and Blacksmiths Field. This would enable more children to walk to school safely.



# Sport and Recreation

There was overwhelming support for a village hall in the parish, (76%), showing various facilities were needed. The main desire was for social functions. Strangely whilst a large percentage felt a need for a village hall, 65% said they would not get involved with the development or running of it. There was also support for the development of a community room at the Primary School, (60%)



## Playing fields

42% said they used the village playing field but only 28% the playground at Levetts Lane. The general consensus was that both the playing field and playground were well maintained although many raised concerns regarding the drainage of the field.

# Children and Young People

A separate questionnaire was devised and circulated to all the young people in the village. 11 primary school and 3 secondary school pupils responded.

Generally the younger children, i.e. under 11 year olds, liked living in the village. They enjoy walking, visiting the castle, playing football, etc. But as they get older they find village life increasingly boring. The particular problems highlighted are the poor public transport, lack of meeting place in the village and absence of any village shop.

## Action points

- continue to press for improvements in public transport provision
- support and encouragement of the village youth club.



## Conclusion

There was a general acknowledgement that the quality of life in Bodiam was high. But perhaps as a result of population change, there was perceived to be less community spirit than in the 'good old days', when a large percentage of the working population was employed in the village. Traffic impact caused some problems and other minor changes were sought. However we hope the spirit of the village is best summarised by the following comment

"We are lucky to live in such a lovely village, it would be good if there weren't too many changes"



# Action Plan

## Road Safety

*Concern:*

Vehicles speeding through the village particularly past the schools and Parish Room.

*Action:*

To continue to monitor the situation and possibly seek expert advice on the best way forward.

*Concern:*

Particular areas of concern around the schools, The Green and Levetts Lane.

*Action:*

Look at the possibility of using some areas of currently unused land to increase parking areas, e.g. from Bodiam Manor School and the old car park in Levetts Lane.

## Transport

*Concern:*

A few people have problems attending medical appointments.

*Action:*

Look at setting up a volunteer driver scheme.

## Walking & Cycling

*Concern:*

A demand for a pavement between Bodiam Primary School and Blacksmiths Field.

*Action:*

Continue to lobby .....

## Housing

*Concern:*

Some demand for more affordable/Housing Association housing in the village.

*Action:*

Lobby for Parish Council to have an input in allocation of housing.

## Sports and recreation

*Concern:*

Demand for a village hall in Bodiam to provide local meeting place and recreational facilities.

*Action:*

Parish Council to actively support a village hall if the opportunity arises.

## Communication

*Concern:*

Need for better communication inside the village.

*Action:*

Pursue development of a parish website to include a village archive.

*Concern:*

Complaints regarding the quality of Broadband service in the village.

*Action:*

Lobby BT to improve the service.

## Crime & safety

*Concern:*

Dissatisfaction over the current level of policing in the village.

*Action:*

Parish Council to continue to support the PCSOs and press for more patrols especially round the sports field/pavilion.

## Children and Young people

*Concern:*

Lack of public transport

*Action:*

Continue to press for improvements in public transport provision

The members of the Action Plan Group are:  
Geoffrey Goodsell, Heather Lewis, Brenda Lovering,  
Richard Mitchell, Barbara Napper, Graham Peters,  
Ellie Pottinger and John Saxby

Between them, they represent 12 village organisations and interests.

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# The Rother Local Strategic Partnership

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The people of Bodiam for their interest and participation in the process of producing this plan

We are grateful to all those who have provided the photographs included in the Plan, including Bodiam Village Cricket Club, Ellie Pottinger, Guy Peters, Roddy Lewis & Peter Waugh.

The photographs of the windows in St Giles Church were taken by Rick Peters of Photo-events ([www.photoevents.org.uk](http://www.photoevents.org.uk)), the drawing of hops is by Barbara Napper and the drawing of the Village Sign is by John Jacobs Studios.

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Back page photo: Windows in St Giles Church

