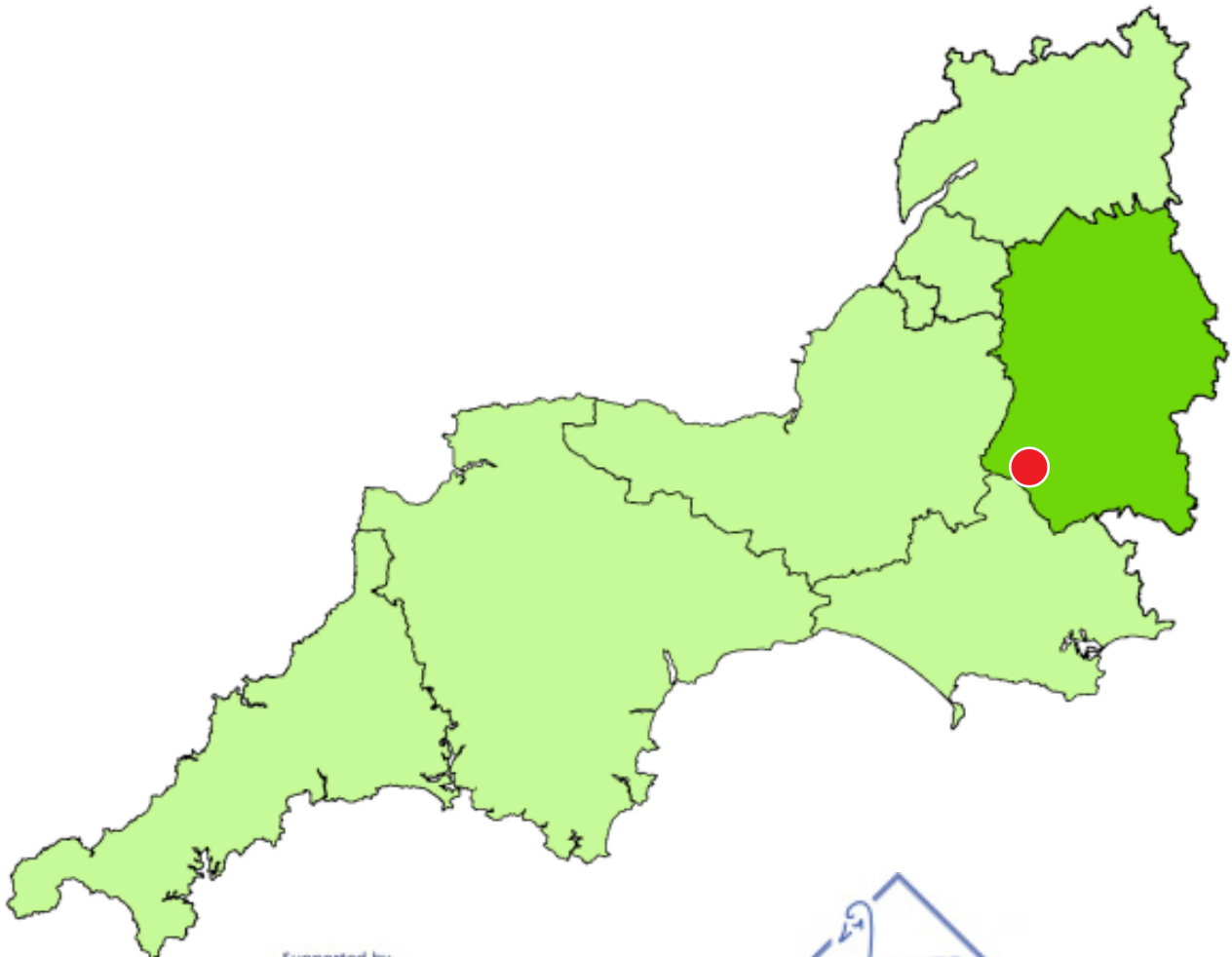


Mere Parish Plan

Completion Date: 2005



Compiled by Community First
In partnership with the South West Acre Network (SWAN)

Mere Parish Plan Case Study

Interviewees

Parish Clerk

Most of the information below was collected as part of Community First's Parish Plan Impact Survey which was completed in 2007.

This has been supplemented by up to date information supplied by the Parish Clerk.

Background

Mere is a small town at the western edge of Salisbury Plan, 23 miles from Salisbury and very close to the border with Dorset and Somerset. It lies very close to the busy A303 road that runs from London to Exeter. Large parts of the surrounding area are part of the Cranborne Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

It has a population of 2608 at 2001 census.

Historically farming was a strong element of the local economy. Many residents commute to nearby towns to work.

Mere has a good selection of local services such as shops, library, medical centre, 2 small supermarkets and a range of other retail outlets.

What is a Community-Led Plan

The Introduction to Mere's Parish Plan states:

'A parish plan should cover everything of relevance to the people who live in the parish, including social economic and environmental issues and will form an action plan to address the needs of the entire community and everyone should have an opportunity to participate in its preparation. The Plan is based on information provided through survey, research and consultation and should contain a clear statement of action. It should help contribute to and form a close relationship with the Salisbury District Local Plan (Development Framework) and the Mere & District Community Plan, by allowing the community to articulate their needs and priorities and to ensure that the activities of the local councils and bodies who provide local services are better coordinated and responsive to the needs of the community. The Parish Council was successful in receiving a grant from the Countryside Agency to help cover the costs in developing and producing the Mere Parish Plan.'

The Process

Mere was probably the first parish in Wiltshire to start a parish plan and benefit from a grant from the Countryside Agency.

A committee was formed at the end of 2001 with a mandate of the Parish Council.

A workshop session was held with representatives from local organisations and businesses in September 2002 as a way of involving them and trickling down the consultation through local groups.

Consultation was also undertaken at the 2003 May Fayre and finally through a short household questionnaire towards the end of 2003.

Following analysis of the consultation a Draft Parish Plan was produced which was shared with potential partners before finalising.

The final parish plan was made available in a variety of formats (summary leaflet, CD, hard copy) and in several venues including the public library. The summary document was distributed to every household in Mere.

What are your achievements as a community to date, as a result of the Community-Led Plan?

There have been some notable successes in sports provision. The PC also negotiated for the leasing of the old Duchy Manor School grounds so that improved sports facilities could be provided for the community. These include a bowling green, sports' pavilion and refurbished changing rooms and old school swimming pool. The PC has also acquired funding for development of a multi use games area.

As a result there are now thriving youth football, bowling, swimming, archery, cricket and adult football clubs. Volunteers have come forward to enable the youth cricket to start.

A Sports Development Group holds regular meetings to manage both existing use and foster new uses of the facilities.

The PC regularly use the document when responding to documents from Salisbury DC and have used it in discussions with the Highways Officer.

People tend to take the PC more seriously when they use evidence from the parish plan.

How has the Mere Parish Plan helped you to engage with your local authority about services your community needs?

The plan is used as a policy document by the Parish Council. It has also been used to help gain funding, to support planning objections or recommendations, and to support requests for traffic management schemes. On planning issues Mere PC reports that Salisbury DC has been supportive as it can be within policy limitations and they feel that it has been useful in influencing some planning decisions and also a decision not to charge for parking in Mere. However a planning decision went against aspirations of the parish plan and the outcome has not been positive for the community. Salisbury District Council introduced a validation process for parish plans after the publication of Mere Parish Plan so Mere's Parish Plan has 'grandfather status' under these arrangements. Although the validation process may be completed retrospectively the PC have decided not to do this.

What other projects have you got planned for the future?

They've just installed an all weather cricket pitch but they hope to develop a grass wicket soon as well.

Have the actions from the Plan brought any funding into the community e.g. lottery grants, trusts, Village of the Year etc.?

The Parish Council received £34,500 funding from Sport England and £10,000 from the Football Foundation for the development of a multi-use games area.

How are you keeping the process alive and advising progress to the community?

The Parish Council submits progress reports on the action plan at each Annual Parish Meeting. Information is published in the village newsletter and a parish website has been set up which the PC feel was received well and is well used.

How has this benefited the community?

When asked the Parish Council reported that as a result of the parish plan there are:

- New people involved in community activity
- New community groups starting
- Better networking between existing groups
- Improved community spirit
- Better understanding of the roles of PC, Local Authority and service providers

Quote

on the Community- Led Planning Process

"It was a really worthwhile process – it's proved really valuable when talking to decision makers and funders."

What lessons have you learned?

- It would be beneficial to get more guidance from District and County Councils.
- Next time would concentrate on using questionnaires as method of consultation (rather than workshop style events) as the questionnaires resulted in wide-range of feedback and large percentage of responses.

How does the Action Plan link into the Parish Council's future business planning?

- The parish plan is used as a policy document for the PC
- An individual Parish Councillor has been given responsibility for one of the twelve headings in the action plan. Each Councillor was then asked to prioritise the actions and one of the actions is brought to a PC meeting each month to review, assess or progress.

One piece of advice for others?

Check out all validation process beforehand so you know all the things you need to do along the way.