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A Parish Plan case study from Wiltshire and Swindon

## **Researching the Parish Economy for a Parish Plan: Kington St Michael, North Wiltshire**

### **The parish**

Kington St Michael is a parish of about 700 inhabitants, situated to the north west of the market town of Chippenham, close to the A350 and bounded to the north by the M4. Part of the village is within a Conservation Area, with the older parts connected by modern developments. The village has a pub, community-run shop, Social Club, Village Hall, primary school, church and recreation ground.

### **The Parish Plan**

This was funded with a Defra grant in 2005 and was completed in 2007.

As well as a parish plan steering group to oversee the plan, there were six active Working Groups each covering different aspects of the work.

This case study presents the work of the Parish Economy Working Group which was led by Rick Squires who speaks here.

### **How did you go about finding out about businesses in Kington St Michael?**

The members of the Parish Economy Group sat down one evening and made a listing of all the businesses run in the Parish, all self employed people and those who lived in the Parish, but owned businesses outside of the Parish.

We then circulated the list to others in the village that were well connected with the local economy and asked them to update the main listing. This provided quite a few more contacts.

We supplemented the above with reference to Dentons Directory and other local publications, church magazines, web searches, etc.

Once we had the listing (including e-mail address, phone number, contact person and street address) we phoned as many as possible to find out their concerns, etc. We had already prepared a detailed questionnaire for use on the call. We split this task between the members of the Parish Economy sub-committee. (This was separate from

the general questionnaire which was distributed to everyone over eleven years old in the village).

### **What did you find out?**

The major finding was that business people did not really know what went on in the village from a business viewpoint, e.g. who else operated in the local economy and what type of businesses they were involved with.

The other findings were:

- There is a need for more day time parking (still a need!).
- We identified a (as yet unsatisfied) need for more office/workshop accommodation within the village. We will include this in the Village Design Statement (i.e. if some buildings were to be renovated, then some could be used for small commercial enterprises).
- The importance of broadband to “enable” the local business economy.
- A number of people had chosen KSM for their business due to our good road and rail transport links.
- From the general parish-wide questionnaire, the majority of people supported the provision of more jobs in the Parish.

### **How was this different from what was expected?**

With over sixty separate business activities identified, there are many more businesses than we thought, and these are spread across a much wider range of activities, number of employees and size (financial turnover).

Many were much larger than expected; some employing people in other parts of the country and overseas. A number operate on a worldwide basis with significant export activities.

### **What new activity/support did this lead to?**

- Six monthly Business Breakfasts were initiated. The first was free and sponsored by the Parish Council. Now everyone pays £5.50 when they attend the meeting held in the village pub.  
This includes everyone introducing themselves and a talk from one or two external parties. E.g. Chamber of Commerce, Business Link, local entrepreneur owning a renewable energy/energy efficiency business, computer advisor (on security), etc.
- Use of myself as a clearing house for local businesses, etc who are looking for services, e.g. secretarial, accountancy, computing support, and also providing ideas to local people who are looking for part-time jobs, etc.
- More local advertising on the Village website covering a range of services.
- More use of local plumbers, electricians, builders and other trades people by others within the village.
- I also circulate information by e-mail which I receive from Business Link, Chamber of Commerce, and similar organisations, regarding general business issues, courses to attend, sources of funding, grants, etc.
- Increased support for the community run Village Shop and Post Point, (see below)

- Provision of local pick-up/drop off point for courier services, parcels, etc. (Village Shop)
- Promotion of energy conservation to the local business community
- People now see that the Village School is also a member of the local business community, as it employs a number of people who bring money into the community or live locally. (We are well supported by the Headmistress)

### **What has been the impact of this long term?**

- Certainly more business taking place within the local community (i.e. between local businesses).
- Increased awareness that people looking for a service should look within the village before going outside.
- Better informed members of the local business community who know where to look for information on the web, who to approach with a problem, and who now have a regular forum where they can discuss their business issues.
- Better community spirit

### **Anything else?**

The number of businesses within the village is surprisingly large and wide ranging. These include; the more traditional activities such as farming, hairdresser, accountant, business mentors, caterers. More unusually, the parish also has a dog psychiatrist, a brewing consultancy, an oil and gas materials supplier operating in Central and Eastern Europe, jet engine supply and maintenance agency, etc, etc. The turnover of the individual businesses within the Parish ranges from under £10k to over £25 million

One other point, the last village shop and post office closed in 2003. The local residents considered that this was an essential part of the village community and set about raising money to convert part of the village hall into a new shop and post office. Supported by community grants, this was opened in 2004. However due to workload pressures, the operator was unable to continue with the running of the shop. Further local fund raising took place, this together with community funding and aid from the Parish Council, enabled the establishment of a community run shop in the same location. This was established as a community enterprise, governed by the rules of the Industrial Provident Society, run by a manager and staffed by villagers on a voluntary basis. This was also supported by the sales of shares to parishioners.

The shop has gone from strength-to-strength, and as well as providing a service for the village, it also contributes to the local economy via the supply of locally sourced produce. In 2008, the Post Office was closed as part of the Government programme; the parish once again took the initiative and established a "Post Point" in the shop which provides all of the postal services previously available from the Post Office and a daily Royal Mail collection.

The shop and Post Point play a vital role in the village. The success of this enterprise highlights the collective spirit within the village to maintain these services which contribute to the social and economic well-being of the community.



**As well as a diverse range of businesses within the Parish, Kington St Michael has a thriving Community Shop and “Post Point”**

**Contact**

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Also see [www.kingtonstmichael.com](http://www.kingtonstmichael.com) to see the various sections of the Parish Plan and the references to the Parish Economy.

For more information about Parish and Community-led Planning in Wiltshire & Swindon please contact:

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