

MITCHELDEAN PARISH PLAN

Adopted April 2012



St Michael and All Angels

Mitcheldean's 14th century parish church

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1. Summary

Mitcheldean parish council started a parish plan process at the annual parish meeting in April 2011, with gratefully acknowledged support from Gloucestershire Rural Community Council and the Forest of Dean District Council.

A parish plan steering group was set up with membership from residents, local organisations and businesses under the banner of “Action in Mitcheldean” (AIM). A “Community Fun Day” was held on 27th August, and the feedback from that day informed a door-to-door household and business survey in October and November (see summary of results at Appendix 1). These results were further refined by feedback from local schools, and also a second Fun Day held in the community centre on 17th March 2012.

All of this deliberation has resulted in two parallel action plans, one being led by the parish council due to links to parish council responsibilities such as the playing fields, and one with a wider remit being led by AIM (see Appendices 2 and 3). This parish plan document is intended to be a geographically-based document (see map of the parish at Appendix 4), connecting the views of local people to the Core Strategy of Forest of Dean District Council (see *extracts in italics*), in the format of a “neighbourhood plan” within the meaning of the Localism Act 2012.

1.1 Key proposals

- Support neighbourhood watch groups throughout the parish
- Report any concerns to the police at once
- Lobby police for a regular foot patrol

- “Shop local” campaign to support local shops and services
- Develop facilities in the library for start-up businesses
- Liaise closely with Vantage Point firms, not least over job vacancies that can be advertised in the library with the help of the children’s centre

- Investigate potential for community composting
- Develop a policy for dogs on the playing fields
- Hanging baskets to be developed with town traders

- Support District Council affordable housing policy
- Lobby housing developers for more start-up homes in particular

- New parish notice board at cross gardens
- Parish website
- Seek new committee to run a village carnival

- Major effort to retain and develop Mitcheldean library

- Discuss the range of potential developments with the sports club
- Manage car park by consent, using alternative spaces to reduce congestion
- Publicise and support bus routes to and from the village
- New bus shelter in the village
- Planned approach to the dirt jumps
- Fundraising for play area improvements
- Youth Internet cafe in the library

1.2 Early projects

- Gardening club looking after parish-owned gardens
- Improvements to the dirt jumps
- New co-operative to support the future of Mitcheldean library
- New skateboard ramp
- Public right to speak at parish council meetings
- Jubilee tree planting above the playing fields

2. About Mitcheldean

Nestling at the root of Plump Hill, Mitcheldean has grown from a tiny settlement to a sizeable town. In 1781 Mitcheldean was a small market town, its life centring around the town hall circa 1710 (site of the former covered market) and a handful of small dwellings and Inns. The town hall still stands a sturdy square building with mullioned windows and residual arches on the ground level. Its immediate neighbour is The White Horse Inn, a fellow survivor of Mitcheldean's varied and occasionally violent past.

A Turbulent Past

During the late 1700's rioting and even murder cast their shadow over the town. Bread riots erupted throughout the Forest of Dean as people starved whilst grain from surrounding farms was diverted to the army in the Spanish Peninsula. A disturbance at Mitcheldean led to a detachment of soldiers being sent from Newnham to quell the unrest. However, the mischievous Mitcheldeaners were not easily quelled and an officer was struck on the head by a well-aimed stone lobbed no doubt with plenty of Forest muscle. Eli Hatton, who was convicted of murder in 1723 and hanged at Pingry Tump at Wigpool overlooking the town, is said to have cursed the town to plagues of flies! Eli's alleged victim was Tom Twiberville, a Carpenter who was battered to death in his shop in the town. Eli's body was hung in a gibbet, a grim signpost to the town.

Industrial Heritage

Gold was once mined at Wigpool, (a scattered settlement between Mitcheldean and Drybrook) but nobody became rich! Mitcheldean once boasted a Brewery as well as several Inns. The White Horse, The Greyhound (on the site currently occupied by the Post Office) The Jovial Colliers, The George and The Lamb, all ensured that Mitcheldeaners need never go thirsty.

As well as a Brewery, the town was once home to clock making, pin making, a brick works and quarry there was also a cement works on The Stenders. A further quarry and Lime Kilns were to be found on Plump Hill. There was a gas works and waterworks at Wigpool (the latter still operating). Nearby Abenhall once boasted the only Dentist in all of Gloucestershire and a professional seamstress lived at Mill End. Sadly she became blind due to the strain on her eyes as a result of her intricate work.

At Fairplay on The Plump there was Iron mining and Iron ore was also mined at Wigpool, when an attempt was made to mine Gold there. The sinking of an airshaft caused Wigpool wells to dry up. There was a Blacksmiths forge on the Gloucester road where the Smith would not only shoe horses but make and repair tools, plough blades etc. and fashion Iron gates and railings.

The Point Inn stood on a sweeping bend on Plump Hill but was demolished circa 1960. The Hill also once had a Tin Chapel and a little shop which supplied bread and other essentials the Plump Hillers. There was a Saw Mill on The Stenders and the surrounding area was largely forest or farmland. Farmers used to bring their grain to the towns market to sell although the bread riots of the 1700's probably helped to discourage them and bring an end to the market. Rank Xerox was for years the main employer in Mitcheldean and indeed the whole forest, today the site it occupies is also home to a number of other businesses including some housed in the old Brewery Malting's which still stand on the site.

An Ancient Heart in a Modern Town

In Mill End stands the old General Store with its former gun range and next to it the lovely 16th century timber framed houses which draw the mind back into the past. In New Street, St George's Villas stands imposingly behind its Iron railings, a handsome building dating from 1683. Mitcheldean's primary school used to be housed in a Victorian building halfway up Hawker Hill. (Possibly named for the itinerate salesman who peddled their wares in the town). Plump Hill School circa 1878-9 stood at the end of Jubilee Road. Forest Gate Church is the oldest Dissenters House in The Forest; it stands on the Gloucester road, a little further up stand Judges Lodgings where the brutal "Hanging" Judge Jefries once stayed. The Medieval Church in the center of the town is an imposing landmark drawing the visitor's eye. In the porch of this church can be seen recorded several bequests made to the town including that of John Harvey Olney of Hertford, a Lieutenant Colonel in the South Gloucestershire Militia. By the terms of his will in 1839, the Rector and Church Wardens were instructed to invest the sum of £200 and from the income distribute blankets and coals to the poor and deserving persons of the Parish.

Mad House to Movie House

The Colchester Wemyss family once owned the Wilderness which stands in its own grounds high on Plump Hill. In later years the house was an asylum and then a hospital. Wigpool is the site of Christ-is-a-weeping (Also called Jesus Weeping) a natural formation in the rock wall of an old Iron Mine which seemed to depict a weeping Christ. During the last war U.S. troops were based on Wigpool and used the mine as a makeshift cinema. There is a story that when the Americans left The Forest they dumped Jeeps and other vehicles and equipment down some of these old mines and then blasted the entrances to close them.

Witches in the Dean?

As recently as 1905 local people would carry Hazel twigs to ward off Witches and in that year a Forest woman called Ellen Hayward was accused of Witchcraft. She was said to have been the source of a series of terrible misfortunes that befell the family of one John Markey from May Hill who had previously consulted her concerning some stolen money. Her case was eventually dismissed.

Final Word

Mitcheldean is at once an ancient and a very modern town. Proud of its past and looking eagerly towards the future.

“Mitcheldean - Footprints Through Time” by local resident Kay A Wozencroft

Acknowledgements

The Forest Of Dean by Humphrey Phelps (Alan Sutton Publishing)

The Industrial History of Dean by Cyril Hart (David and Charles)

3. Action in Mitcheldean

3.1 Parish plan process

Following discussion at the annual parish meeting in April 2011, a steering group was set up with a broad membership and the following terms of reference:

Name:

Action in Mitcheldean

Inaugural members:

- **Andrew Maliphant**, Mitcheldean Parish Council (chair)
- **Brian Bennett**, Vantage Point
- **Ian Whitburn**, Forest of Dean District Council
- **Jackie Fraser**, Mitcheldean Parish Council / Forest of Dean District Council
- **Katherine Baker**, Mitcheldean Parish Council
- **Liz Lewitt**, Almshouses Treasurer & Visible Agency
- **Pat Tuson**, Mitcheldean Library Action Group
- **Stephen Parslow**, Mitcheldean Community Association
- **Steve Jones**, Forest Gate Church
- **Sue Henchley**, Mitcheldean Parish Council

All local residents and businesses keen to support the group's objectives are welcome to join the group and attend meetings

Goals:

1. To develop a parish plan for Mitcheldean
2. To develop and deliver an action plan based on the parish plan's priorities
3. To regularly review the plans and their delivery

Deliverables

- Parish plan display
- Mitcheldean Community Fun Day
- Parish questionnaire, to go round every household and business
- Parish plan and action plan by the end of March 2012

Scope / Jurisdiction

The scope of the group covers anything that local residents or businesses feel is important to the future of life in Mitcheldean parish.

The group can raise money and progress projects, but cannot commit Mitcheldean Parish Council to a course of action, only make recommendations to the parish council for their consideration

Guidance from the Parish Council

Mitcheldean Parish Council support the objectives of Action in Mitcheldean and are a continuous source of suggestions and ideas.

Resources and Budget

The group acknowledges receipt of £2000 from Mitcheldean Parish Council, and £1,000 from Forest of Dean District Council

Governance

Decisions are reached by consensus.

Additional Notes

- Regular advice is received from Gloucestershire Rural Community Council, who are the county experts on parish plans
- Communication outside of meetings is conducted by phone and email.
- Shared information will be stored on a parish website in due course
- The group is a parish working party supported by Mitcheldean Parish Council
- Monthly progress reports are circulated in advance to parish council meetings
- The parish plan process was announced at the 2011 annual parish meeting.
- Questionnaires are due to be delivered to every household and business by the end of October 2011 and collected by the end of November, with a public meeting to review the findings in January 2012
- Some projects are already under way, such as a community co-operative to support the running of Mitcheldean library

The group had followed the following timetable:

	Main activity
April 2011	Announce parish plan proposal at Annual Parish Meeting 26.4.11 Invite interested people onto a steering group
May	First steering group meeting - confirm timetable for process
June	Investigate the “vision” for the plan – layout and content Plan and prepare for community involvement
July	Confirm roles on steering group – who does what
August	Publicise the process noting key events Special public launch event Bank Holiday Saturday
September	Devise and deliver household questionnaires
October	Gather questionnaires and share feedback
November	Draw up first draft parish plan
December	Draft action plan drawn from parish plan / community feedback
January 2012	Second major public meeting to review emerging plan
February	Circulate final draft parish plan and action plan
March	Final version to parish council meeting for formal approval
April	Completed parish plan presented at Annual Parish Meeting Add any final changes, start implementing the action plan! Update as time goes on

3.2 Public events

The first public event in good weather on 27th August provided a range of family attractions on the playing fields and attracted a good number of local people. Steering group members in “Action in Mitcheldean” T-shirts greeted people with short questionnaires, and feedback on local priorities from these and also ideas posted on an exhibition stand in the community centre were used to create the questions in a door-to-door household and business survey in October and November. The survey results were then further refined by feedback from local schools, and also a second Fun Day held in the community centre on 17th March 2012 which sought more detailed information around desired improvements to the children’s play area.

3.3 Survey

Over 300 out of 1162 households replied to the survey, and 16 local businesses. An analysis of the 300 household responses that met the original deadline was carried out by Gloucestershire Rural Community Council and is attached at Appendix 1.

3.4 Key priorities

Top of the response list was the issue of car parking charges, when 294 households out of 300 had something to say, mostly against!

Please see below a list of the other issues or suggestions which drew a common response or net major concern from more than 100 households i.e. at least a third of respondents:

SCORE	PERCENT	ISSUE or SUGGESTION
220	73	Bus times and other information to be more available
204	68	Carnival (would attend)
191	64	Car boot sale
181	60	Flower tubs / hanging baskets in the village
166	55	Deal with broken glass on the play area
166	55	Village appearance
164	54	Dog fouling (need waste bins)
160	53	Litter (several suggestions about what to do)
160	53	Public transport improvements
154	51	Fireworks evening
154	51	Community Fun Day
154	51	Parish magazine / newsletter
151	50	Condition of roads
150	50	Christmas lights
145	48	Control dogs on playing field
143	48	Recycling facilities
141	47	Library use, including for information & evening classes
136	45	Farm market
134	45	Parish notice board
125	42	Bakery
121	41	Concerts
115	38	Speed through the village
109	36	Improve lighting at playing field car park (& lock at night)
106	35	Trim track for jogging
105	34	More exhibitions e.g. art
105	34	Condition of paths and pavements
100	33	Heritage / garden open days

4. Issues / policies / themes

The District Council's 2012 Core Strategy has this summary for Mitcheldean:

Mitcheldean with a population of over 2200 is also the location of Vantage Point, a business estate which with its neighbouring MEWS workshops covers about 28ha. This includes by far the largest range of workspace available for rent in the district ranging from high quality offices to large areas suitable for manufacturing or warehousing. The Core Strategy recognises this and will permit further intensification of employment on existing sites in Mitcheldean. There are other smaller employment sites at Mitcheldean and although the services in the centre have declined over recent years there is still a range including a library and health centre. The review of settlement boundaries to be undertaken is unlikely to make major changes and as a result the village is likely to experience steady development, including some intensification within the existing built up area and realisation of existing commitments over the next few years.

The following sections relate the feedback from the parish survey to the policies in the Core Strategy, and propose local policies and actions. There is also a selection of quoted replies from individual survey forms.

4.1 Community Safety

“Seen only 1 policeman driving through, and only 1 warden” – survey quote

The District Council's Core Strategy is principally concerned about “secured by design” – building in anti-crime features to new housing.

Parish survey said:

- Third of households would like to see improved lighting at the playing fields car park, with the gates locked at night
- Biggest concern was about the levels of policing
- Lesser concerns about antisocial behaviour or street warden's work

PROPOSALS:

- **Support neighbourhood watch groups throughout the parish**
- **Report any concerns to the police at once**
- **Lobby police for a regular foot patrol**

4.2 Economy

“More business opportunities” – wish from parish survey

The District Council’s Core Strategy says:

Some of the larger villages provide services for wider areas and some have an important role in this overall strategy. The very largest include Mitcheldean which has an employment area of some 28ha including manufacturing space and offices.

New or expanding enterprises will be encouraged in villages and in suitable circumstances in the open countryside where they can make a positive contribution to their localities in terms of economic and social well being. This means that there will be a positive view taken where proposals can demonstrate that they are sustainable and would benefit their localities.

In rural areas including the villages, the emphasis will be on sustainable rural development to be promoted where it supports the local economy and is compatible with the conservation of the countryside. The strategy is to reinforce the role of the villages, especially the larger ones and groups where this will make a positive contribution to the sustainable long term future of the area, and especially its economy.

Amongst the group of the major villages, Mitcheldean stands out as having a very large employment site and this will continue to be supported.

The strategy is to provide a wide range of opportunities and to encourage a more diverse economy.

Parish survey said:

- Keen on farmers’ market, new bakery & tea room
- Not keen on more takeaways
- More equivocal about other suggestions

PROPOSALS:

- **“Shop local” campaign to support local shops and services**
- **Develop facilities in the library for start-up businesses**
- **Liaise closely with Vantage Point firms, not least over job vacancies that can be advertised in the library with the help of the children’s centre**

4.3 Environment

“Tougher penalties for dog walkers for allowing them to foul on ground”

The District Council’s Core Strategy has some broad policies:

The use of previously undeveloped sites in the open countryside will be appropriate only in rare cases. Proposals that have a harmful effect on the built and natural landscape, or their surroundings or would result in unreasonable demands for infrastructure will not be acceptable.

Economic development, including tourism based enterprise in rural areas needs to be compatible with the surroundings and landscape, and should be sustainably located so that it contributes to the locality, rather than just being conveniently located

Except where allocated in a development plan, land which is identified as being of amenity value and all forest waste whether so identified or not, will be protected from development.

There is a national bye-law against allowing dogs to foul the pavements.

The parish survey said:

- Major concerns about dog fouling, village appearance and litter
- Notable interest in recycling facilities but less on renewable energy
- Two-thirds in favour of hanging baskets and flower tubs

PROPOSALS:

- **Investigate potential for community composting**
- **Develop a policy for dogs on the playing fields**
- **Hanging baskets to be developed with town traders**

4.4 Housing

“We are concerned about housing for young people and the elderly, as it is in very short supply.”

The District Council’s Core Strategy focuses on affordable housing:

In common with every other district in the southwest, there is a shortage of affordable homes in the Forest of Dean and the provision of affordable homes is a priority. This includes the need for homes, including affordable homes for an increasingly aged population

All new houses will also need to be suited to the requirements of the area in terms of type and size, taking account of the requirements of crime prevention

There is a greater need for affordable housing throughout the district than can be met and it will therefore be provided wherever there is a suitable opportunity. The predominant need is for rented, mainly smaller family units. Market housing should also concentrate on two and three bedroom houses, reflecting the need to balance the overall housing stock towards today’s smaller households

The villages will be expected to provide much of the new housing and employment not planned for the towns and although the sites concerned will be generally modest, provision should be in keeping with the scale and function of the settlement concerned. Affordable housing is especially important in villages and will be encouraged throughout the district, again in proportion to the scale of the settlement concerned and the identified need.

Mitcheldean will provide 101 new homes by 2026, of which sites 60 have already been identified by March 2010. Priority will be given to development on previously developed land and on sites identified for housing in the development plan. No new greenfield sites will be released unless it can be proven that land is not available from other sources and is needed to meet the plan’s requirements. The proportion of affordable housing sought will be 40% of the total number of dwellings on each site.

Parish survey said:

- More in favour of “brownfield” development, and using local materials
- Most in favour of affordable housing
- Starter homes seen as biggest need

PROPOSALS:

- **Support District Council affordable housing policy**
- **Lobby housing developers for more start-up homes in particular**

4.5 Public Life / Communication

“I would read a Mitcheldean notice board, save money for other things”

The District Council’s Core Strategy is more about planning matters than public life, but the parish survey said:

- Allow residents to speak at parish council meetings
- List of interesting information – bus times top
- Hierarchy of ways to share information – parish magazine top
- List of community events – carnival top
- Over half keen to see Christmas lights

PROPOSALS:

- **New parish noticeboard at cross gardens**
- **Parish website**
- **Seek new committee to run a village carnival**

4.6 Public services

“Broadband is poor even though we are only 2.5 km from B.T. Exchange in Drybrook”

The District Council’s Core Strategy has this to say:

The services, employment and other facilities on offer over the range of settlements is critical to the maintenance of thriving communities and the further development of them will be supported by this Core Strategy

As development is permitted it is important that it provides the necessary infrastructure to support the services it needs. This includes provision for the community services including the emergency services which in turn have a role in providing safer communities.

Parish survey said:

- Types of service required from library (list)
- Some dissatisfaction with public toilets and broadband
- Varying satisfaction with other services – electricity top

PROPOSALS:

- **Major effort to retain and develop Mitcheldean library**

4.7 Sports & Leisure

“Community fun day combined with prizes for best jam / largest vegetable / painting etc”

The District Council’s Core Strategy only covers leisure in terms of land use, but the parish survey said:

- High level of satisfaction around the playing field
- Lower level for children’s play area
- Third of respondents would use a trim track (for jogging)
- Smaller numbers for bowls, rugby and cricket
- Over a third interested in swimming pool
- Third interested in exhibitions e.g. art
- Smaller numbers for other indoor interests (list)

PROPOSALS:

- **Discuss the range of potential developments with the sports club**

4.8 Transport & traffic

“Buses are dirty, malfunction, don't turn up, late, cannot be relied upon – must have car to get anywhere!”

The County Council’s Local Transport Plan is the source of any strategic proposals for Mitcheldean. The parish survey said:

- List of things to encourage more public transport use – more routes top
- Speed through village seen as a major issue
- Other concerns to a lesser degree (*list*)
- Concerns also about state of roads and pavements
- Overwhelming objection to car parking charges

PROPOSALS:

- **Manage car park by consent, using alternative spaces to reduce congestion**
- **Publicise and support bus routes to and from the village**
- **New bus shelter in the village**

4.9 Young People

“I would like a playground for the over 12s with maybe a skateboarding ramp”

The District Council’s Core Strategy

Where there is an established need, new development will be expected to make provision, or a contribution towards provision, of open space and other facilities including those required for children’s play and youth/adult recreation.

Parish survey said:

- *Add feedback from young people’s & schools surveys*

PROPOSALS:

- **Planned approach to the dirt jumps**
- **Fundraising for play area improvements**
- **Youth Internet cafe in the library**

5. Projects

The responses from the parish survey prompted around 40 project ideas, to go with those already in train such as the dirt jumps and Mitcheldean library.

5.1 Delivery mechanisms

There are two parallel action plans, one being led by the parish council due to links to parish council responsibilities such as the playing fields, and one with a wider remit being led by Action in Mitcheldean (see Appendices 4 and 5).

The parish council meet on the second Monday of every month to discuss progress, and have set up a number of sub-groups to progress projects in between meetings, such as the playing fields sub group.

Action in Mitcheldean (AIM) meet quarterly and operate on a similar basis.

5.2 Sources of funding and support

The parish council has put £10,000 in a fund to support parish plan projects. Expenditure is approved by the full council on a monthly basis and is often passed to AIM to manage the actual spending. AIM in turn have received some funds from the District Council, and can act as an official body to receive the results of any project fundraising.

5.3 Quick Wins

A number of new projects are being delivered at once:

- Gardening club looking after parish-owned gardens
- Improvements to the dirt jumps
- New co-operative to support the future of Mitcheldean library
- New skateboard ramp
- Public right to speak at parish council meetings
- Jubilee tree planting above the playing fields

5.4 Lobbying/cooperation

Early advice and support has been received from the Forest of Dean District Council, Gloucestershire Rural Community Council, and Vantage Point Business Village. AIM as an independent group are well placed to undertake any lobbying that would not be appropriate for the parish council.

6 Emergency planning

The parish council took the decision many years ago to keep a reserve of £100,000 against any financial or other disaster to befall the parish.

The main identified risk has for many years been any release of the chlorine gas which is stored at the water works at the top of Wigpool hill. Being heavier than air, this gas would then roll down the hill into the village. A warning siren is tested every Wednesday morning at 10 a.m. – the siren going off at any other time is a warning to the village to take immediate precautions, as publicised by Severn Trent:

In the case of a real emergency the warning alarm will sound continuously for at least 3 minutes. If you hear this alarm you should follow the instructions on the card which are also listed below:

Go In

- *Go indoors*
- *Close all doors and windows*
- *Switch off all heating and ventilation systems*

Stay In

- *Go upstairs where possible*
- *Keep away from doors and windows*

Tune In

- *Tune in to local radio for more information*
- *Follow any instructions given by the Emergency Services*

All Clear

- *When the emergency is over the alarm will sound intermittently for 1 minute*
- *Once you have heard the all clear alarm it is safe to turn on heating and ventilation systems, open doors and windows and go outside*

Other potential emergencies also need their own plan:

- Floods due to heavy rainfall, as in 2008
- Village being snowed in, as in 2010 and other years
- Flu or other epidemic
- Failure of communications
- Failure of electricity supply
- Failure of food supply
- Failure of local employment / economy
- Failure of public transport
- Failure of water supply

Plans for these emergencies will be developed separately by the parish council.