

The Seavingtons' Village Plan

Condensed Version

Prepared for and published by
Seavington St. Mary and Seavington St. Michael Group Parish Council
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Foreword

The concept of small rural communities generating and implementing their own “Parish” or Village Plan came from central government at a time when increasing centralisation was a real threat. Centralisation inevitably means making the smaller communities harmonise to what is best for the large urban areas of our nation and that represents a threat to an environment and way of life that we in the Seavingtons have inherited or deliberately chosen.

For this reason the invitation to research, prepare and move forward on our own Village Plan was most welcome; the fact that, through its Countryside Agency, the Government was prepared to contribute to the cost came as a bonus.

This document is our blueprint for the future and details our aspirations. As you know, there has been an extensive consultative process to which all village residents have been given the chance to contribute; two thirds of you seized that opportunity and, here in our Village Plan these ideas have been distilled into a series of proposals each one of which has an owner or “Proposed Actionee”. We have used the latter term quite deliberately to indicate quite clearly that we expect things to happen as a result of the Plan.

Most items in the Plan are not at all spectacular; they merely reflect our aspirations for the next few years. Once implemented and taken together, however, they will make quite a difference to life in the two villages. It would be wrong to expect rapid change but over a few years we should expect to see the full impact of the proposals.

The Plan and its implementation are the responsibility of the Parish Council but it would be unreasonable to expect a handful of elected Parish Councillors to take all of these proposals forward. That is why we have elected to pass responsibility for individual proposals to village organisations best suited to deal with them and why, for some activities, we propose establishing a Parish Council Support Group (PCSG). This latter group will comprise volunteers and co-opted villagers who are prepared to work for the common good on activities for which there is no other natural home; as the name implies the PCSG will work directly for the Parish Council leaving the latter to concentrate on its regular work and Plan responsibilities for which it has statutory duties.

To maintain momentum the Parish Council will conduct an annual review of progress and, as our affairs develop, may choose to annex extra proposals to the Plan. Thus, the Plan will become a living scheme, continually evolving to improve our lives.

I look forward to seeing the results of all this work bearing fruit and would like to acknowledge the support we have received from the Countryside Agency, Somerset Rural Community Council and South Somerset District Council.

Simon Madge,
Chairman, Seavington Parish Council

Supported by the Countryside Agency

Introduction

Parish or Village Plans

A few years ago the Government decided to give small rural communities a bigger opportunity to influence issues important to them and to set out a vision for their own town or village to guide its future development. Accordingly, through DEFRA and the Countryside Agency, encouragement, guidance and funds were made available to Parish Councils to enable them to create what it called "Parish Plans".

DEFRA and the Countryside Agency have set this objective *"The Parish Plan is a vision of how you would like your town or village to be. For many communities, it's also the foundation for other applications or local action. It aims to help rural communities have a greater say in their own affairs. We want people to set down their vision for the future of their town or village. A development plan is a prerequisite for Quality Parish status."*

A Parish or Town Plan can cover everything that is relevant to the people who live and work in the parish, from social housing to places for children to play. It should address the needs of the entire community, including local businesses. Everyone should have an opportunity to contribute to its preparation."

Government has also made it clear that these plans, once adopted, will strengthen applications for grants and other funding or investment; the veiled threat is that without a plan there is less likely to be further financial help for communities from National, County, Local Government organisations or QUANGOs (QUasi Autonomous Non Governmental Organisations) such as the Sports Council or Arts Council who administer lottery and other grants. Thus, even grants for village projects from the National Lottery might be prejudiced if the project was not included in the plan.

The descriptor "Parish" naturally refers to the civil administrative parish rather than the ecclesiastical parish. Since the Seavingtons civil parish comprises two ecclesiastical parishes the authors have chosen to refer to a Village Plan to avoid confusion with any church forward planning activities and this convention is used throughout the remainder of this document.

Preparation of the Village Plan

Early in 2004 the civil Parish Council invited village residents to an open meeting to discuss the proposed Village Plan and, in the middle of the year, applied for a modest grant to support the extramural costs involved in the preparation of the plan.

At the end of October 2004 the Countryside Agency awarded the sum of £1,875 for the work and, in December the Parish Council set up a Village Plan Action Group, to work under its direction, comprising Nigel England, Julie Fowler and David Froome. As the work has progressed the Action Group has co-opted Brenda Lake and Matt Day as additional members.

Since then the Action Group has engaged in a village-wide consultative process which has included the preparation, distribution, collection and analysis of a special questionnaire and a number of open days offering the opportunity for all residents to discuss all the issues and the proposed content of the Plan. The timetable for this process was:

20th March 2005	Distribution of Village Plan Questionnaire to all households
30th March 2005	Free evening film show for teenagers accompanied by explanation and discussion on young people's requirements in the plan including a special questionnaire
31st March 2005	Free morning film show for younger children accompanied by explanation and discussion on young people's requirements in the plan including a special questionnaire
9th April 2005	"Lets Plan It" Open Day with Parish Council presentation and the opportunity for discussion accompanied by light refreshments.
21st April 2005	Final date for return of questionnaires
14th May 2005	Second "Lets Plan It" Open Day in with Parish Council presentation on preliminary questionnaire response analysis and the opportunity for discussion accompanied by light refreshments.
5th July 2005	Special Parish Council meeting to review results of consultative process and agree content of Village Plan before presentation to residents on 16th July
16th July 2005	Presentation of findings of consultative process with the opportunity for villagers to comment further on the proposed content of the Village Plan

About two thirds of the two villages' populations took part in the consultative exercise either through the questionnaire or the public sessions.

This Village Plan was agreed by the civil Parish Council at its meeting on 25th October 2005.

Ownership and Implementation of Village Plan

The civil Parish Council is responsible for the development and publication of the Village Plan i.e. it is the "owner" of the Village Plan.

However, the Parish Council's formal responsibilities for implementation are restricted to those activities for which it already has some statutory responsibility such as planning issues etc.

All other proposals made in the Village Plan will be passed to currently existing village organisations to consider in detail and to implement. Where there is no appropriate existing village organisation to take forward a proposal the Parish Council will encourage the establishment of a temporary or permanent organisation for the purpose.

Similarly, should an existing organisation not wish to take forward a proposal made in the Village Plan the Parish Council, at its discretion, may seek the establishment of a new organisation to do so.

In all cases the civil Parish Council will give its full support to applications for grants and local authority or central government support for the implementation of proposals made in the Village Plan.

The Villages

Today the civil Parish comprises the two villages of Seavington St Mary and Seavington St Michael which lie in a hollow within a larger area of low-lying hills and valleys which runs broadly East-West. A part of the South Petherton Hundred, originally the area included seven settlements (Seven tons) which have gradually merged or vanished; even into the last century Seavington Abbots was still recognised as a separate entity.

Seavington St Mary is the larger of the two villages with some 163 dwellings and 361 inhabitants at the 2000 census. Seavington St Michael, whilst smaller with 57 dwellings and 125 inhabitants, appears to have become the more important since the motor car forced the building of New Road to straighten the London to Exeter route early in the 20th century thus by-passing Seavington St Mary. Since then, in 1988 the new Ilminster by-pass has taken away much traffic although the road through Seavington St Michael is still a major access route to the market town of Ilminster.

In the 19th Century agriculture was the dominant industry and employer with some limited outworking, glove making, carried out by the women and girls. A century later, the villages are still surrounded by agriculture but consolidation of land holdings and mechanisation means that it is very much a minority employer. By the time of the 2000 census half of the two villages' working population was employed in managerial and professional positions; with the exception of a few home-workers these travel to jobs away from the villages. There is very little opportunity for full or part time employment in either village. About 20% of the combined populations are over 65 and therefore retired.

These demographic changes have brought with them a revolution in the housing stock. New build, which is strictly controlled under planning legislation, is mainly of large, expensive, luxury-style houses. Underused agricultural buildings have been converted to housing, again in the more expensive range and former labourers' cottages have been upgraded and, in some cases, merged. The cost of a home has risen with these changes of use and the general UK housing market so that young people brought up in the villages are forced to leave their rural roots and seek homes in the neighbouring towns.

At one stage both villages had Post Offices and general stores, shared a bakery, in Seavington St Michael, and had the opportunity to patronise several inns. Time and commercial pressures have reduced these services to one inn - The Volunteer - and occasional travelling shops.

Other economic pressures made the Church of England merge the parishes, close St Mary's Church and share the Rector with South Petherton. All the village schools have vanished and children are bussed to the larger conurbations nearby.

The nearest doctor's surgeries are a sub-branch of the Martock surgery in South Petherton or those in Ilminster, both some 3 miles away. The nearest general hospitals are in Taunton (18 miles) or Yeovil (12 miles) although there are cottage hospitals with limited out-patient facilities in South Petherton (currently closed), Crewkerne (7 miles) and Chard (10 miles). The Village Policeman was withdrawn many years ago and, today, reliance is placed on a remote police call centre and a part-time Police Station in Ilminster.

There are limited bus services covering the villages which are subsidised by the local authorities. The economic necessity of sharing these with other villages means that journeys are often both time-consuming and impracticable. However, changes to these services during the Plan consultation period suggest that the subsidising authorities are monitoring their use and are responsive to criticism.

A new bus service to Yeovil, introduced in late July 2005 shows promise but only time will test its viability. A further, new, "on demand" service links the Seavingtons to doctor's surgeries in South Petherton and Martock. However, none of these bus services offer links to the national rail network.

Whilst the foregoing may appear a rather gloomy description of the villages it is factual. Nevertheless, the residents of the two villages are generally content with the status quo and, as demonstrated by the consultative process, wish to preserve the broad shape, ethos and environment of their communities. They seek only minor improvements in services and facilities which, in the main, require no major subventions or investments.

Indeed, both villages have recognised economic facts and elected to fund and share a large playing field and modern village hall, owned and managed by the Seavington Playing Field Association (SPFA), which, along with The Volunteer Inn, forms the centre of village social affairs acting as venues for clubs and societies as well as big village events. The Villages also have their own monthly magazine, The Seavingtons' News, which is delivered free of charge to every home and funded by waste paper collection and advertising.

The way ahead

As explained earlier the Village Plan is owned by the civil Parish Council. Throughout this document proposals are made for further action to meet the wishes of the residents expressed through the consultative process.

Quite clearly, the Parish Council must retain responsibility for those activities for which it has statutory responsibilities. Other proposed activities already have natural "owners" in the form of existing village organisations and clubs and these have been invited take on these planned activities wherever it was sensible to do so.

However, there are many other new activities identified in the plan where the Parish Council would be the natural focus but which fall outside both the statutory responsibilities of Councillors and what it is reasonable to expect from, already busy, volunteers.

For these latter activities the Parish Council intends to establish a Parish Council Support Group (PCSG) of volunteers to take these activities forward under the guidance of the Parish Council. It is anticipated that this PCSFG will be formed in early 2006.

It will also be open to existing village clubs and organisations to offer to take forward activities currently allocated to the Parish Council.

Timetable

This Village Plan is intended as an umbrella for the development of the Seavingtons and their communities until 2015 and, to ensure its relevance it will be reviewed by the Parish Council annually. The annual review will monitor progress on the various activities and review progress with "actionees" or activity "owners" and examine new proposals and annex them to the plan if appropriate.

The following sections of this Village Plan outline the existing situation, the responses from the consultations showing particular issues raised and the proposed ways forward in providing solutions to those issues.

Although Parish, District and County Councils and other agencies will be involved in delivering some of the solutions, it should be noted that a great deal of community work, in the form of volunteers and/or working groups, will be required to drive forward each of the areas of work. Some solutions can be quick to achieve, others will take longer and involve many other parties.

As implementation of the Plan gains momentum The Seavingtons' News will be used to invite volunteers for particular areas of work. In the meantime, please get in touch with the Parish Council if you would like to get involved in any particular area of work.



The Seavingtons need you !



Village Development

How would we like the Villages' to develop in the future?
This important area covers both housing and employment.

Housing

In the questionnaire, there was strong support for affordable housing (72%), with 56% opposing more rental housing, and 58% opposed to further retirement housing provision.

The housing mix of the villages is mainly owner-occupier (81% average across both parishes), with a typical amount of private rented accommodation for South Somerset (10%) and a small proportion of social housing compared with other nearby villages (7% - all figures from South Somerset Parish Profiles).

Developments in the housing market over the past 10 years mean that it has become increasingly difficult for young people to get on the property ladder, especially in rural, relatively low-paid areas such as the Seavingtons. Recent new build homes and agricultural building conversions in the villages have been aimed at the more expensive end of the market, usually attracting buyers from outside the communities. There has been no attempt to force landowners and developers to include new affordable housing in their plans which explains the overwhelming support for affordable housing.

It is recognised that estimating the volume of requirement for affordable housing is a complex task which is outside the scope of this plan. Further there are a number of mechanisms for ensuring that such housing goes to its primary target and for ensuring that, after low-cost provision, it does not become part of the general inflationary housing market; these mechanisms involve such concepts as equity sharing and other more complex arrangements.

The authors of this plan recognise that such provision is, in part, a political issue which may conflict with other planning desires to consolidate and build up local towns such as Ilminster and Chard. However, the Parish Council believes that without affordable housing our communities will very rapidly move much further towards being commuter zones to neighbouring towns or retirement zones.

Accordingly, the Parish Council will push for recognition of the need for affordable housing provision with the appropriate authorities and for moves to satisfy the requirement.

Employment

The Seavingtons have for many years increasingly become 'home' to people rather than a centre for employment. However the consultative process has revealed a desire to keep, or even develop, job opportunities in the villages - 60% supported small business units and 51% would like more businesses. This somewhat surprising response means we must look seriously at this issue.

It is clear that the relative closeness of Ilminster, Crewkerne and other towns that already have business units and trading estates means that any new employment opportunities in the Seavingtons must be complementary. Seavington has good road connections, a high quality environment and improving telecommunications, so is ideally placed to provide high-quality units/workshops for small businesses, which can have a positive effect for the 'host' community. Local examples of success in such provision may be found in the workshops/office units at Bowdens Farm at Hambridge or the craft centre in Beaminster.

Rapid rate of change in the agricultural sector means that many redundant agricultural buildings are likely to become available for such employment purposes over the next 10 years. The Parish Council wishes to see any such employment opportunities exploited to the full and intends to support appropriate planning applications.

The positive support from the community for small business units shown in the consultation might be met by understandable 'NIMBY' resistance once suitable sites are identified, but this could be minimised by sensible siting i.e. adjacent to the New Road (old A303). Also, new developments do not happen because some villagers think it's a good idea - a developer would need to be convinced of the business case and a suitable site found. Any new site would of course need planning permission, which could well involve negotiation of a change to the current Local Plan.

Whilst any possible new development remains an aspiration, in the short term, we should ensure that the villages retain the zoned employment land that exists, which includes the Lift West site and the new Loxston site. If in the future there is any change of use application for these sites the Parish Council now has evidence to resist or to demand re-zoning of alternative sites as offsets, supporting high quality units/workshops if proposed.

Village Design and Planning Statement

The consultative process revealed satisfaction with the existing planning processes, managed by the SSDC. However, there was very strong support for the preparation of a Village Design and Planning Statement (82% of respondents) which, once agreed, would form an established reference for future developments.

Such a Village Design and Planning Statement would reflect residents' aspirations for the future and would need to be negotiated at various levels of Local Government. This statement would be prepared against the background of the new Local Development Framework (LDF) arrangements shortly to be implemented by the District Council. However, once agreed, the statement would provide a background against which developers could make proposals and planning authorities make decisions in accordance with the wishes of the community. Even if higher level agreement cannot be reached, the existence of such a document would greatly strengthen the Parish Council's hand in dealing with piecemeal planning applications.

A broad working group would be needed so that any document is a balanced view, with a draft distributed in the villages for comments and amendments.

Proposals		
No	Proposal	Proposed Actionee
A 1	Push for recognition of the need for affordable housing provision with the appropriate authorities and for moves to satisfy the requirement	Parish Council
A 2	Resist any planning application that attempts to convert existing employment land into residential without re-zoning of alternative sites for appropriate employment	Parish Council
A 3	Support change of use to convert redundant agricultural buildings to appropriate alternative business uses	Parish Council
A 4	Investigate possible sites suitable for small business units and research their viability	PCSG
A 5	Village Design and Planning Statement to be produced and negotiated	PCSG

Community Safety

Policing and Neighbourhood Watch

The consultation process revealed that almost three-quarters of respondents were concerned about the fear of burglary or theft and that 10% had been victims although they had failed to report the crimes to the police. In general, people were much less worried about the fear of mugging, vandalism or harassment although a small number claimed to have been victims and failed to report the fact to the police. There was evidence of similarly unreported car crime in the villages although only 40% expressed concern at the risk.

In spite of this, a small number of residents said that safety and security fears prevented them from leaving their homes and participating in communal activities. One dog-walker said that, during the dark evenings, she took her dog to Ilminster by car rather than risk walking on the unlit Seavington roads or playing field. Other respondents would not let their children go to the playing field in the evening meaning that they had little play during winter evenings. However, there was strong opposition to the suggestion of extending permanent street lighting in the villages; preservation of the rural ambience and avoidance of further light pollution were cited in support.

These statistical findings were accompanied by numerous comments on the perceived inadequacy of policing in the area, poor response when the police are contacted and lack of any regular police presence. A question on peoples' willingness to pay an extra increment of Council Tax for improved policing drew very adverse remarks regarding the existing very high police precept and its regular growth at a far higher rate than general inflation or family incomes.

The mobile police station which intermittently visits the Millennium Hall was considered a waste of resources since it added no tangible value to the community.

The inclusion of the City of Bristol, some 60 miles distant, within our police area was seen as wholly negative in its effect since it drained cash and manpower to an urban and crime-riddled area which required regular and intensive policing to the detriment of our rural community. The perception of the impact of Bristol on local policing has been confirmed by historic press articles and statements by the police themselves. It is proposed to contact other villages in the area to use the public debate on the Government's proposed re-organisation of police forces to attempt to remove Somerset Police from the stranglehold of Avon and Bristol to a more appropriate, rurally minded, police authority.

Although the monthly village magazine carries regular articles on the, long established, Neighbourhood Watch scheme the survey and discussion revealed surprising ignorance regarding the way the scheme works. Further, the apparent police neglect of the scheme had caused many to doubt its utility.

Proposals		
No	Proposal	Proposed Actionee
B 1	Arrange a village briefing and question & answer session from a senior police officer	Parish Council
B 2	Contact other villages to coordinate protest about inadequate policing and attempt to secure removal of Somerset Police from resources stranglehold of Avon and Bristol to a more appropriate police authority	Parish Council
B 3	Re-educate villages about function, membership and operation of the Neighbourhood Watch scheme	Neighbourhood Watch coordinator
B 4	Consider lighting the village playing field during the early part of winter evenings to permit children's sport and safe dog-walking.	SPFA
B 5	Establish a working group to set up a "Good Neighbour Scheme" which could escort vulnerable residents to village functions and regularly check on their welfare	PCSG

Motor Vehicle Speeding

The consultative process found that three-quarters of village residents were concerned about the safety implications of the speed of motor vehicles passing through the villages. This concern extended not only to the speed of traffic in both directions through Seavington St Michael, but also to the lower volume of traffic passing along Water Street, Townsend and Scott's Hill in Seavington St Mary.

There was particular concern over the speed of traffic as it passed the Millennium Hall and Playing Field which regularly exceeds the 30mph limit; it was felt that an enforced 20mph was necessary here and possibly elsewhere where children are regularly forced to walk on or cross roads which have no footpath or identifiable crossing points.

There was recognition and appreciation of the Parish Council's work in arranging for a Community Speed Watch scheme with a radar speed-gun and the work of the volunteers who operate the scheme. This had resulted in a trial of an automatic "Speed Visor" which advised motorists that they were exceeding the current 30 MPH limit. It was, however, noted that these efforts at speed control had, so far, excluded Seavington St Mary.

There was a general lack of support for provision of "rumble strips" or "speed humps" but strong support for permanent flashing advisory speed signs and "pinch

points” associated with the village entrances proposed in the following section of this plan. The latter, if sensibly sited, were felt to give a much more effective warning of danger than static village signs as well as forcing a speed reduction on traffic. Further, “pinch points” might deter some Ilminster bound traffic which could use the A303 and approach Ilminster from the west. The classic highway authority objections to such pinch points are not seen to be valid on a road which was recently declassified from “B” to “C” status by the same authority.

Proposals		
No	Proposal	Proposed Actionee
B 6	Seek installation of permanent flashing advisory speed signs in Seavington St Michael and Seavington St Mary	Parish Council
B 7	Seek 20mph speed limit in appropriate places within both villages; particularly in Water Street to protect children accessing the Millennium Hall and Playing Field	Parish Council
B 8	Expand scope of Community Speed Watch scheme to cover Seavington St May	Parish Council
B 9	Seek “pinch points” on entry to the village areas, to be associated with the proposed Village entrances	Parish Council

The Environment

What would improve the Villages' environment and appearance?

The responses to the consultation indicated that the majority of those living in both Seavington St Michael and Seavington St Mary felt that they benefited from a good village environment. The responses also indicated that the villagers place a strong emphasis on respect for the countryside and conservation.

Specific environmental issues raised in the Village Plan questionnaire were subsequently discussed at the public consultation days. The findings are outlined as follows:

Flowers and Shrubs

There was great support (85% in the questionnaire) for the provision of more flowers and shrubs to enhance the overall appearance of the Seavingtons. The possible future provision of gateways/entrance signs to the Villages was discussed and it was felt that this, combined with judicious planting, would add to the attraction of the Villages and could also act as a timely reminder to reduce traffic speed when entering the Villages.

In addition, in order to encourage personal pride in the appearance of the Villages, it was suggested that an annual gardening competition could be held with awards for best hanging basket, best display/new garden etc. The possibility of entering the Villages into a local/countrywide village competition was also raised.

Since the villages have a strong Gardening Club the Village Plan Action Group proposes to invite the Gardening Club to make proposals for a three year rolling programme together with estimates of initial and recurring costs.

Trees

75% of the questionnaire respondents indicated that more trees should be planted. In parallel with the consultative process the village Tree Wardens have produced a report which highlights the need to "maintain a rich landscape benefiting from trees, shrubs, wildflowers and wildlife, which increases the conservation value of the environment, making it a sought after and healthier place for humans to live."

The report identifies areas of prime importance for the immediate and long-term future, together with planting opportunities in the Seavingtons and a list of recommendations in respect of tree and shrub species planting. The Tree Wardens are invited to make detailed proposals for implementation over the next two years and to include both initial and recurring cost estimates.

The Tree Wardens' report is to be given to the appropriate organisations and individuals as an approved Annex to this Village Plan.

Benches and Seats

The provision of further outdoor seating in the Seavingtons received support from 62% of those who took part in the consultation. Accordingly it is proposed that the Seavington Playing Field Association and Tree Wardens work together to make realistically costed proposals for suitable sites and type of seating.

Village Entrances

“An entrance to a village is always welcoming – it’s like a light in the night at your front door.” - Extract from one resident’s response to the Seavingtons’ Village Plan Questionnaire.

The majority of those who responded to the questionnaire, together with those who attended the public consultation days, indicated that the approaches to the Villages should be improved with obvious village entrances. These were seen as both environmental and road safety features. It was also felt that the entrances/signs should be co-located with traffic pinch points, if possible, in order to encourage the reduction of traffic speed through the Seavingtons – see previous section of this Plan. The Parish Council has already taken the initiative by inviting villagers to submit ideas and plans for locations of any village entrances.

Litter

A substantial majority of respondents to the questionnaire wanted a reduction in litter; during the open days it emerged that one major concern centred on litter around the Millennium Hall.

It is proposed that the Parish Council consider establishing regular litter picking sessions in the Villages and / or encourage the “adoption” of sections of roads by neighbourhoods to keep them free from litter.

Dog Fouling

There was a strong response (84%) in favour of action to reduce dog fouling, particularly on the playing field. Both responses to the questionnaire and the public consultation process identified the need for more dog litterbins around the villages.

It is proposed that the Seavington Playing Field Association review the dog-fouling problem on the playing field and implement rules and remedies and that the Parish Council provide more dog litterbins in the Seavingtons.

Off Street Parking

The consultation showed a substantial majority of residents who wanted more off-street parking. A number of problem areas were identified including the car parking area opposite The Volunteer, School Lane and the Millennium Hall. The latter was seen as the area of greatest concern, particularly when there was a large function and parking spilled over onto the roadside verges.

It was felt that better use could be made of the overspill car park at the eastern end of the playing field and a number of suggestions were made on how the situation could be improved eg a footpath from the overspill car park to the hall with the provision of low level lighting to encourage its use during the hours of darkness.

The Parish Council is well aware of the general parking issue and will continue to pursue improvement. The SPFA is asked to review the problems at the Millennium Hall and take steps to facilitate use of the existing overflow car park.

Highways

Responsibility for maintenance and repair of the roads, lanes and verges in and around the villages lies with the Somerset County Council Highways Services Division, much of the work being contracted out to W S Atkins. Certain minor works, within 30 mph areas, such as road sweeping, removal of fallen trees and dead animals is the responsibility of the District Council. The Parish Council has negotiated and established a formal link to the Highways Services Division with a specific nominated member responsible for the interface.

During the period covered by the Village Plan consultation there were concerns that the Highway Services Division was compromising road safety through delaying and restricting maintenance work to save money, particularly on control of verge vegetation. It is thus considered vital that the villages' interests in this area continue to be protected by maintaining and developing the Parish Council's influence through the link and focus with the Highway Services Division.

Footpaths

"We enjoy walking around the village and surrounding countryside and have appreciated new signs marking the footpaths." Extract from one resident's response to the Seavingtons' Village Plan Questionnaire.

Whilst the questionnaire showed that 81% of the respondents were satisfied with access to the countryside, there were a significant number of comments (particularly at the public consultation days) about the need for improved maintenance of footpaths and the replacement of some stiles by kissing gates to encourage impaired mobility and older users.

It is proposed that the Parish Council press for an improved standard of maintenance of footpaths and arrange for the provision of some kissing gates; the role and duties of the villages' new Lengthsman should be included in this brief. Alongside this, existing occasional voluntary working parties should be asked to form a more permanent team under the Parish Paths Stewardship Scheme run by South Somerset District Council.

Proposals

No	Proposal	Proposed Actionee
C 1	Consider annual gardening competition and entry into regional or national competition	Gardening Club
C 2	Make proposals for a three year rolling programme of flower and shrub planting schemes with cost estimates which include recurring costs.	Gardening Club
C 3	The Tree Wardens to make detailed planting proposals for implementation over the next two years including both initial and recurring cost estimates.	Tree Wardens
C 4	The Tree Wardens' report to be issued to appropriate organisations as an approved Annex to Village Plan	Parish Council
C 5	Seavington Playing Field Association and Tree Wardens to work together to make realistically costed proposals for suitable sites of further public seating	Tree Wardens & Gardening Club
C 6	Continue to work for provision of Village Entrances and traffic pinch points (correlate with proposal B 9)	Parish Council
C 7	Establish litter picking sessions and encourage "adoption" of streets by neighbours	Parish Council & PCSG
C 8	Review dog fouling problem on the playing field and implement rules and remedies	SPFA
C 9	Provide further dog litter bins throughout both villages	Parish Council
C 10	Continue to work towards improved off-street parking	Parish Council
C 11	Review parking arrangements at Millennium Hall and facilitate use of existing overflow arrangements.	SPFA
C 12	Maintain and develop the Parish Council's link and influence with the Highways Services Division of the Somerset County Council	Parish Council
C 13	Press for improved footpath maintenance, consider the role of the Lengthsman and replace some stiles with kissing gates	Parish Council
C 14	Encourage members of occasional working parties to form a permanent team under the Parish Paths Stewardship Scheme	Parish Council & PCSG
C 15	Continue to develop and maintain link with Highway Services Division and maintain pressure for continuing and improved maintenance of local highways	Parish Council

Education and Early Years

Early Years

There was a strong desire to see improved provision for young children in the village. In the questionnaire, people were asked 'if provided, would they use nursery facilities in the villages? The result was that 14 respondents from the 32 families with appropriately aged children supported the provision of either Nursery or Creche facilities.

Some felt that the villages cannot be self-sufficient when it comes to providing Nursery facilities. This is the case with many of our neighbouring villages' Mums and Toddlers groups which rely on parents bringing their children from other villages, something Seavington could do for both Mum's and Toddlers and Nursery. Options could include joint provision with other villages.

However, a Nursery useful to working parents would require substantial funding, possibly a business to run it and agreement with the Village Hall for its use.

Other suggestions made during the consultation to help families with young children included:

Building on the existing Mums and Toddlers group that currently meets one afternoon a week in the village hall

Community events to help integrate new families

Millennium Hall should be open to, and supportive of, child-orientated events

It is interesting to note that the Seavington's have a growing population of families with young children - four families moved into the village between August 2004 and August 2005.

Education

The questionnaire showed a moderate satisfaction with education although with only two questions specifically on children's education the results do not give us the full picture.

71% of respondents were satisfied with Infants schools, 65% were satisfied with Primary schools, and 62% of respondents were satisfied with Secondary school.

The questionnaire and the consultation days identified the following issues regarding education:

Catchment areas - at present the Seavingtons fall into the Ilminster catchment area yet many of our children already attend other schools (including Shepton Beauchamp, South Petherton, Barrington and Hinton). This creates the situation where children in the village don't know each other and is therefore divisive within the village community. It is proposed that discussions with the Local Education Authority on revising the

catchment areas should take place with lobbying if required.
Parental choice should of course be kept.

Lack of transport for secondary school children not in tertiary system
- could be addressed by car sharing

Lack of holiday play schemes or sports coaching

The need for bus shelters for children waiting for school transport
and a safer crossing near the Volunteer Inn

The lack of a village school was an obvious issue; however it seems unlikely that the LEA will build a new school. An alternative could be a joint school with another village, as many other village schools have little outdoor play space, and with our excellent playing field and village hall we have something to offer. In return our village children would be allocated places and share transport to the joint school.

We should take the opportunity to use our playing field to host after-school sports, sports coaching, holiday play schemes and/or a village sports day which would also allow children attending different schools to socialise. These options could be looked at by the wider Sport working group.

Adult Education

There is strong demand for adult education classes in the villages, and the two local providers (Yeovil College and Somerset County Council's Adult Learning and Leisure) should be contacted to discuss further opportunities. Computing courses that run in the Village Hall were popular, and courses could also be taught at The Volunteer Inn if agreement could be reached with the Landlord.

The most popular courses identified in the survey were:

Computing & IT skills (43), Health & Fitness (41), Foreign languages (33), Arts & Crafts (32), History & Culture (29) and English language studies (7).

Proposals		
No	Proposal	Proposed Actionee
D 1	Early Years Provision - consider developing Toddler group and investigate Nursery provision	PCSG
D 2	Address school catchment areas issue with LEA along with joint school concept	Parish Council & PCSG
D 3	Bus shelters and safer road crossing investigated	Parish Council
D 4	Provide sporting opportunities to village children	PCSG
D 5	Provide sports coaching and holiday play scheme for children	PCSG and SPFA
D 6	Adult Education courses developed with appropriate bodies	

Sports Facilities

The consultation process in this area was, consciously, made open-ended. In both the questionnaire and subsequent open meetings residents were asked “If the Parish Council or local community were to start raising funds for additional sports facilities what would you like to see and support ?”

The following were identified as the most desirable facilities:

Tennis

MUGA (Multi Use Games Area)

Bowls (including short mat bowling)

Badminton

Access to swimming pool

A number of short-term solutions could be implemented at relatively little cost in order to satisfy demand. However, the longer-term question of the provision of sporting facilities for the two villages should be assessed in relation to the existing and projected uses of the playing field and the Millennium Hall.

The provision of such sporting facilities is closely linked to the needs of young people (see Youth section on Page 34) and could involve a number of bodies and agencies, both within and outside the villages. Initially, it is proposed that further work is conducted jointly by the SPFA and PCSG.

However, the wider issue of sporting involvement and healthy living opportunities for people of all ages should be addressed by a wider working group, led by the SPFA, drawn from all those interested in developing this aspect of village life.

Proposals		
No	Proposal	Proposed Actionee
E 1	Establish mechanisms for providing the extra sporting facilities listed above	SPFA & PCSG
E 2	Establish a working group with broad membership to investigate and recommend healthy living and sport facilities for a wide age range	SPFA & PCSG

Energy

How to better supply our energy needs in the future

The Village Plan questionnaire only covered satisfaction with public utilities but discussion at the Open Days revealed a number of related issues including the non-availability of piped gas in large parts of the villages.

Gas

Large parts of the villages do not have a piped mains gas supply. The Parish Council have looked into this issue before, but will do so again in the light of changed fuel economics.

Oil

An oil purchasing cooperative could be formed to purchase oil at preferential rates. There is already one such group in School Lane. It is proposed that the organiser of this scheme be asked to consider widening the scheme, supported by other volunteers. If this approach is untenable the PCSG and other interested parties should form a working group to look at a wider scheme.

Green Energy Sources

We should also look at the big picture – fossil fuels are a limited resource and at some point alternatives will be needed. Also, the cost of gas, electricity and oil have all risen sharply recently, something that young families and old people find particularly difficult. There is also a link between placing value on living in a beautiful part of the country and using energy sources that do not damage our environment.

We should consider embracing alternative energy sources in the Seavingtons, whether solar power, small-scale wind power, heat-pumps, biomass (heat from burning renewable crops) or any other type. Seavington could become a model of 'green' technologies, and it is proposed that new buildings should at least use passive solar technology in their design, reducing the need for fossil fuels.

Practical ways of doing this could include: informing existing residents of the technologies available, using organisations such as Somerset Trust for Sustainable Development and case studies of people in the Seavingtons who have already installed green technologies; promoting existing grant schemes that can help with the installation costs; and to include in the Village Planning Statement a desire to see new buildings incorporate good ecological design.

The idea of using 'alternative' energy sources often draws a dismissive response from older, wealthier people who are used to cheap fossil fuels, however 'alternatives' will become mainstream in the lifetime of younger people in the villages and should be taken seriously.

Proposals		
No	Proposal	Proposed Actionee
F 1	Re-visit the provision of a piped mains gas supply to whole village	Parish Council
F 2	Investigate widening the scope of the School Lane heating oil purchasing group to include both villages	Existing organiser & PCSG
F 3	As alternative to F 2 establish village-wide heating oil purchasing scheme through voluntary working group	PCSG
F 4	Promote ecological design and renewable energy sources within the villages	PCSG

Transport

Although sited on one of the main road routes from London to the South-West the Seavingtons were bypassed by both main rail routes. However, the station at Ilminster, three miles distant, offered branch line links to both of these main lines at Chard Junction and Taunton respectively. This branch line was closed in the Beeching era but left no legacy of frustrated dispossessed rail commuters. The nearest railway stations today are Crewkerne, 7 miles away, and Taunton, 17 miles away; neither station is served by direct public transport from the Seavingtons.

Local bus services linking the villages with the surrounding area have also become victims to operating economics and public transport is now limited to subsidised services. Undoubtedly the growth in car ownership contributed to the loss of these services but, conversely, lack of public transport has forced car ownership on some. The consultation process revealed that 10%, or 22 households still had no car in spite of these pressures - a decrease in car ownership since the 2000 census - the households with cars averaged 1.9 cars per household.

The 2000 census also showed that residents of the Seavingtons travelled an average of some 10 - 12 miles to their places of work; current bus service timetables suggest that most Seavington commuters travel to work by car.

The consultation brought out a number of criticisms of the, then current, bus services. These included:

1. the failure to connect with the mainline railway services at Crewkerne or Taunton
2. the impossibility of taking a direct bus from Seavington to Taunton and returning on the same day
3. the lack of a direct bus service to Yeovil
4. the lack of a bus service permitting access to the main supermarkets in Taunton or Yeovil

Since the consultation the bus service timetables have been revised and new services introduced. A service aimed at students at SCAT in Taunton is open to the public offering the opportunity to leave the Seavingtons at 7.11 am and return back at about 6.15 pm - a very long day in Taunton! Revisions to other services permit short shopping trips to Chard or Crewkerne, albeit not every day.

Further routes N6 and N7 have also been introduced in 2005, N7 as recently as the end of July; it is thus difficult to assess their utility to the average resident. Whereas Route N7 is a classic bus service with predetermined stops N6 has a short core service with the addition of pre-bookable pick-ups and drop-offs over a wide area including the Seavingtons. Important features of the N6 service are the taxi-like operation for Seavington residents and the inclusion of scheduled stops at doctors' surgeries in South Petherton and Martock.

Unfortunately, these bus services are poorly advertised and little known to residents who might otherwise use them. As demonstrated by the changes and additions during 2005 there appears to be no adequate consultative process to ensure that bus services accommodate residents' needs.

Proposals		
No	Proposal	Proposed Actionee
G 1	Contact major supermarkets to request that their free shoppers' bus services be extended to include the Seavingtons	Parish Council
G 2	Contact Somerset County Council and South Somerset District Council to seek direct bus connections to main-line railway stations	Parish Council
G 3	Maintain contact with Somerset County Council and South Somerset District Council to ensure that the Seavingtons' interests in the subsidised services are protected.	Parish Council
G 4	Arrange adequate publicity for local bus services and distribute timetables	Seavingtons' News

Utilities

In general residents were tolerant to shortcomings in utility provision in the villages such as the unreliability of the electricity supply. The lack of a piped public gas supply is covered in the Energy section of this plan. Concerns were expressed over shortcomings in telecommunications provision and the waste collection and recycling arrangements of the local authority.

Seavington telephone subscribers are reached as remote outposts from BT's South Petherton telephone exchange which is, itself, a subsidiary to a larger telephone grouping under the "01460" area code. Geography dictates fairly long cable routes from South Petherton to individual Seavington subscribers and BT blames this for late provision and poor performance of its ADSL broadband services; only half the promised speed is available here.

This has a detrimental effect on home-workers in the villages and, perhaps more importantly, on gaining the educational benefits of the Internet in an area which is already educationally deprived. Further, capacity restrictions have prevented some residents from gaining access to ADSL.

Technology developments already available to BT would allow economic provision of much faster Internet access and this near-monopoly provider should be pressed to accelerate its implementation for the Seavingtons. Under no circumstances should the villages be left until almost the last in the UK for further service improvements.

Turning to waste and recycling services, the local authority has changed the collection arrangements since the consultative process was completed. Nevertheless, one of the main criticisms still remains valid - the Council refuses to accept plastic waste for recycling. The consultation revealed strong feelings regarding the need for a plastic waste recycling service even if this is a recycling skip alongside the existing skips at the Millennium Hall.

Since the public consultation over this Village Plan the Royal Mail has begun a process of re-assessing mail collection services. At present the Seavingtons have three mail collection boxes and the services have included twice daily weekly and Saturday pick-ups together with Sunday collections from one box. The proposed rationalisation would have seen the Sunday collection disappear but representations from villagers have preserved it for the time being although the daily services have been reduced to a single afternoon service. It is understood that Royal Mail are regularly checking the volumes of post collected in the villages so that it is important to use the post-boxes to ensure their retention.

Proposals		
No	Proposal	Proposed Actionee
H 1	Press BT for early implementation of the technology to improve ADSL Internet access speeds in the Seavingtons	Parish Council
H 2	Press BT for early improvements to exchange capacity to permit all who request it to be given ADSL connections.	Parish Council
H 3	Press South Somerset District Council to arrange a plastic waste recycling scheme for the villages	Parish Council
H 4	Monitor Royal Mail collection schedules and intervene if collection arrangements are threatened with downgrading	PCSG

Support

The nearby village of South Petherton and towns of Ilminster, Taunton, Crewkerne, Chard and Yeovil provide the majority of shopping, social and health needs of the people living in Seavington.

However, these journeys are usually made by private car, or, occasionally, the local bus service although the latter is not always a possible or practical solution. No organised community transport system is currently available.

A number of mobile shops service the area; greengrocer, butcher, fishmonger and grocer but are not well advertised. It is possible that many residents, especially the newer residents, are unaware of these services (90% of the respondents of the questionnaire found the mobile shops inadequate).

Strong support has been indicated for attempts to establish a part time Post Office and for a village shop (92% of respondents). It was felt by many respondents that the Volunteer Inn might be the appropriate site for Post Office facilities.

Proposals		
No	Proposal	Proposed Actionee
I 1	Investigate the provision of a part time Post Office and implement if viable	SPFA & Volunteer Inn
I 2	Obtain details and publicise a list of mobile shops with visiting times and location of stops	Seavingtons' News
I 3	Investigate the viability of a village shop and implement if possible	PCSG & SPFA

Other support services suggested in the consultative process included a lunch/coffee club, visiting health services - dentist, doctor, health visitor and in particular, featuring quite highly, chiroprapist.

There was also concern over the future of South Petherton hospital which is currently closed pending re-building. Although not an "acute" hospital it has in the past offered certain outpatient services and convalescence to locals residents after major surgery or illnesses, acting as a bridge between the "acute" hospital and returning home.

Over a quarter of respondents to the questionnaire indicated a perceived need for local advice clinics.

Proposals		
No	Proposal	Proposed Actionee
I 4	The Volunteer Inn has indicated that they are looking at starting a coffee morning. They already provide food at lunch times	Volunteer Inn
I 5	Initial enquiries have already begun on (private) visiting Chiropody Services. Times/dates/venue yet to be finalised.	PCSG
I 6	Explore the possibility of visiting health services	PCSG
I 7	Maintain pressure on the local health authority to implement its promises to rebuild and reopen South Petherton hospital	Parish Council
I 8	A list of local telephone numbers of advice services to be circulated in the Seavington News	Seavingtons' News

Library Services

Public Library services are to be found locally in South Petherton, Ilminster and Yeovil. A mobile library service visits the area, but is not greatly used. Results from the questionnaire reveal a need to increase awareness and access to the mobile library and with a greater variety of books being made available. The need for a book club / reading club was also indicated

Proposals		
No	Proposal	Proposed Actionee
I 9	Mobile Library Service times and dates to feature in the Seavington News and on the Village notice board.	Seavingtons' News & SPFA
I 10	Reading club to be set up	Mr Ken Lake

Information and News

97% of respondents of the questionnaire were well satisfied with the Seavingtons' News as a means of conveying local information. Other local publicity mechanisms including the Village Notice boards, local posters, the Volunteer, Church Magazine, door to door leaflets and word of mouth were less popular and less used.

In response to a direct question it was made clear that, there was a demand for a village website (62%) and more notice boards, possibly to include an employment notice board. Clearly, the ownership of a web-site is important from both the point of view of impartiality and ensuring regular updating. Possible owners include the Parish Council, SPFA or the Seavingtons' News and this should be resolved; it is noted that the Seavingtons' News has recently registered an appropriate Internet domain which could also support the web-site.

70% of respondents asked for better information from the Parish Council, 46% required better information from the SPFA. Although minutes of the Parish Council meetings are already displayed on the Village Hall notice board, some weeks after the event, it was felt that the Seavington News could provide more topical summarised reports and publish agenda.

Proposals		
No	Proposal	Proposed Actionee
I 11	Establish village web-site - "Ownership" to be discussed and agreed	Parish Council, SPFA & Seavingtons' News
I 12	Review current village notice board locations and consider alternatives and the need for more	Parish Council & SPFA
I 13	Parish Council be invited to look at their own publicity more closely and consider providing agenda and meeting summaries to the Seavingtons' News	Parish Council
I 14	SPFA to review its publicity, advertising and promotion of SPFA information and events.	SPFA

Youth

In addition to the main questionnaire and open consultation special arrangements were made for young people's views and ideas to be ascertained. There were two free film shows aimed at the younger and older youngsters which included facilitated sessions to ascertain the young people's views and a special youth questionnaire was completed by 29 young people (9 of whom live outside the village but visit or temporarily reside on a regular basis). Overall responses covering young people's interests embraced some 56 under the age of 18. This section is devoted to youth but sport is such an important activity for young people that the reader is urged to consider the Sports section of this plan alongside this youth section.

Figures from the 2001 Census show the number of 4 -15 year olds to be 60 and 16 - 24 year olds to be 55.

The village cricket club has been closed for a number of years and the football club closed at the end of last season. Junior football posts, available for casual use on the playing field, are used on a regular basis and a casual village cricket match brought out a good number of people over a wide age group, including youngsters.

There has been no village youth group for a number of years and young people have little opportunity for socialising together in the village, especially the over 10's as they tend to go to several different schools in the area. The recent introduction of children's cinema has provided an opportunity for socialising but unlike the adult evening screenings has not proved popular, possibly due to choice of film and timing of screenings. Discussions at the open days and youth film shows showed that many young people find this lack of community social life distressing.

The youth consultation showed a substantial proportion interested in a Youth Club, Football Club, Cricket Club, Cycling Club and an Arts & Crafts Club. Significant numbers were also interested in possible day trips to a theme park, beach or physical activities. There was also significant interest shown in archery, climbing, horse riding, ice skating, snowboarding, swimming tennis, ten-pin bowling and trampolining. The less formal consultation at open days and the facilitated youth sessions brought forward further suggestions for a MUGA , climbing wall and BMX track. A small number of young people already participated in some of these activities away from the villages, using parental transport; all expressed disappointment that they had to travel in this way.

Further, more than half of the responses of the main questionnaire said that they would use facilities such as a mountain bike area, skateboard park, hard games area, or youth theatre group.

What is unambiguously clear from the results of the consultation is that there is a latent demand for proper youth facilities in the villages. However, the way in which the survey covered young people's interests, with the split between the main questionnaire completed by households and the youth questionnaire, suggests that further, more detailed, consultation with the villages' young people is necessary.

This should be focussed both so that it includes a greater spread of the younger population and to narrow down the wide number of possibilities which, quite clearly, could not all be provided. It must also ensure that any proposals that require significant investment would be supported by a sufficient number of families to justify the effort and cost.

Many of the activities in the young people's aspirations could be undertaken under the umbrella of a, properly supported, youth club although many young people might prefer to be offered "pick & mix" ad hoc facilities and activities. It is therefore proposed to involve the County Council's Youth Service to assist with further investigations as a preliminary to making firm proposals to be added to this Village Plan as an annex.

The Jubilee Playground - (Children's Play Area)

The play area situated alongside the village hall is well used and of a good standard. Equipment and grass area are well maintained with 87% of respondents being pleased with this facility. Suggestions for additional equipment included a bigger climbing frame monkey poles and bars for the slightly older children

Proposals		
No	Proposal	Proposed Actionee
J 1	Approach County Youth Service for assistance in eliciting detailed views from young people on clubs, activities and facilities	SPFA & PCSG
J 2	Prepare formal proposal and action plan for provision of young people's facilities in the villages as annex to this Village Plan	PCSG & SPFA
J 3	Consider additional equipment for the Jubilee Playground children's play area	SPFA

The SPFA and Millennium Hall

The Millennium Hall was built in 1998 after substantial local fund-raising effort and the award of a grant from National Lottery funds. From the outset the Hall has been owned and managed by the Seavington Playing Field Association (SPFA), an existing village organisation and registered charity.

The SPFA is managed by a board of Trustees, the majority being representatives of village organisations based on either the playing field or hall. A small number of trustees are elected members. The SPFA owns and is responsible for operating and maintaining the playing field, hall and Jubilee Playground children's play area; the latter was constructed in 2000 after fund-raising by an ad hoc group of villagers.

Currently, the charity has some debt, shortly to be repaid and income is derived from several sources including outside lettings, community functions, income from individual village organisations using the facilities and specific fund-raising activities of the SPFA itself.

Regular users from the village and immediate area include a Whist Club, Mother and Toddler Group, a Fine Arts Society (NADFAS), Yoga Classes, Gardening Club, and Social Club.

The, once strong, village cricket and football teams have withered and ceased to function, in part due to lack of volunteer effort to organise and manage them. The children's play area is considered a great success and is popular with the young of the villages and outsiders.

Feedback from the questionnaire itself and consultative process indicated that 96% of the respondents regarded the Millennium Hall as a major asset to the Village with 46% using the Hall at least once or twice per month. However, a number of suggestions for change and improvement have been made.

Suggestions made during discussions and from the questionnaire include the following:

Outside of the Building

Outside tap/toilet facility

Improved and enlarged car parking

Internal

Provision of a medium sized meeting room for small groups

Provision of stage lighting and other facilities

Management

Improved, more open, committee structure

New Activities

Farmers Market

Line Dancing

Large Screen for sporting events

Theatre, cinema and opera trips

Amateur dramatics

The Management need to consider the results of the questionnaire and look at prioritising some of these actions.

Proposals		
No	Proposal	Proposed Actionee
K 1	Review the membership and structure of the Trustees and committee and take steps required to broaden	SPFA
K 2	Market and promote the AGM in order to attract new "blood" to the committee and share the work load	SPFA
K 3	Establish a clear policy on the priorities of outside lettings versus time given over to local clubs and events.	SPFA
K 4	Consider suggested new activities such as line dancing farmers market, large screens for special events and return of IT classes.	SPFA
K 5	Investigate organising theatre, cinema and opera trips for the communities	Social Club & SPFA
K 6	Consider establishing amateur theatrical group based at the Millennium Hall	SPFA
K 7	Investigate feasibility of augmenting current playing field facilities with an outside tap and toilet facilities for casual playing field and play area users	SPFA
K 8	Investigate the feasibility and costs of developing medium sized meeting rooms which are accessible without disturbing activities in the main hall.	SPFA
K 9	Look at improving stage lighting and other facilities	SPFA

The Volunteer Inn

The Volunteer is a village country pub which offers a variety of food and drink at reasonable prices. With the pub employing 2 full-time staff and 8 part-time, the Volunteer also offers one of the few current opportunities for local employment.

Bed and Breakfast rooms are available (3 rooms), as is the recently refurbished non-smoking dining room (seats 26), which is frequently used for wedding parties and other small social functions.

Conscious of trying to develop a community service to its local residents, the landlord offers “cash back” services, sells stamps and honey, maintains a community notice board and promotes and supports local events in the Village. The landlord holds the licence for and manages the bar functions in the Millennium Hall.

Feedback from the consultation indicated that the vast majority of residents found The Volunteer to be a village asset, with half of respondents using it at least once or twice a month. Suggestions for change include the addition of a Post Office and shop, themed food evenings, a more varied menu, a skittle alley, a family games room and a chess club.

The Landlord has been kept fully informed of the Village Plan consultative process and interim findings. As a result, he is looking to increase use of the smaller of the two bar areas by hosting specific interest groups, which could not currently be accommodated in the Millennium Hall, such as music and foreign language sessions. Clearly, the community must recognise that such uses for village activities must have a commercial base.

Short term

Future Plans by the landlord to strengthen ties with the local community include the following:

- The continuation of events such as Quiz Evenings and Wine Tasting.
- Exploring the possibility of holding a coffee morning once a week.
- Exploring the possibility of themed evenings,
- Continue to review the food menu in general.
- Building on the success of the SMEZ evenings.

In summary, most of the points and suggestions raised by the questionnaire will be met by the landlord's own plans for improvement. Some aspects however, such as increased Post Office facilities, increased parking and the addition of a skittle alley are obviously much harder to achieve and dependent on many other factors.

Longer term

The Parish Council recognises the contribution to the community made by the Volunteer Inn which forms a vital part of the social fabric of the two villages and several neighbouring hamlets. Further, it recognises the potential impact on the villages were the premises of the Volunteer to be converted to any other use than a village inn. Accordingly, the Parish Council will oppose any proposal for change of use of the premises which would remove or threaten its current role in the community.

Proposals		
No	Proposal	Proposed Actionee
L 1	Landlord to continue to work closely with the community for the benefit of everyone	Volunteer Inn, SPFA & PCSG
L 2	The Landlord works with the SPFA to provide Post Office facilities - see Proposal I 1	Volunteer Inn & SPFA
L 3	The Parish Council to oppose any proposal for change of use of the Volunteer premises which threatens its role in the community	Parish Council

The Church

The Village Plan Action Group omitted to include the Church in its consultation process but, at the same time, recognised the historic importance of the Church in village life. Accordingly, the Church was invited to contribute to this report so that its role could be embraced in the final proposals.

St Michael's Church, Seavington St Michael, is the last of the churches in the Seavingtons to remain open for regular worship. Five churches were lost during the Middle Ages and St Mary's Church, Seavington St Mary, was declared redundant in the early 1980s.

St Michael's is currently a parish church within the united benefice of "South Petherton with the Seavingtons". The Church Council of the whole benefice is advised on Seavington matters by a local committee, so the church has a fair amount of autonomy.

The St Michael's Seavington Church Trust is an autonomous body which raises funds for the upkeep of the Church and has raised and spent some £18,000 on various essential items in the past four years.

For some time the aim of the church has been survival and the preservation of its fabric. In recent years, however, a regular pattern of Sunday worship has been re-established and the congregation has grown. Some 10% of the population of The Seavingtons now regularly attends services on Sundays. The style of worship is largely traditional with occasional gentle ventures into the more adventurous. The pace of change is determined by the local population.

Larger congregations usually gather for special occasions during the year - including occasional services at St Mary's. Several of these have a clear aim at affirming the work of the community such as Rogationtide, Harvest and the Christmas carol service.

Future diocesan plans involve the creation of a "local ministry group" of parishes centred on South Petherton and the onus of developing the work of the church in the community will devolve even more on the local community. The current policy of the parish as a whole is aimed at equipping and affirming the local congregation to fulfil this task. A potential non-stipendiary priest is currently in training from the parish and it is hoped that, in 2006, a team of pastoral assistants will be trained for work in the Seavingtons.

Recently, a number of "story keeper" parties have been held for young people in the parish and it is hoped to develop this work further with the appointment of a part-time youth worker, part of whose time would be spent in the Seavingtons.

As the oldest organisation in the two villages the Church wishes to serve the local community in a non-obtrusive way.

Proposal		
No	Proposal	Proposed Actionee
M 1	Work with the SPFA and PCSG to coordinate provision of youth facilities in the Seavingtons	Benefice of South Petherton with the Seavingtons