

Report from Community Focus Group

Version history:

1. V1 circulated to Focus Group participants for comment on 5 July
2. V2 with additional comments about communication and the addition of appendices 1 & 2 circulated to Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group on 12 July
3. V3 (final version) with changes to the appendix and published on Lymstone Village website

The focus group met on 26th June 2012 at the Village Hall. Participants volunteered following the original community consultation on 18 April, and publicity in the Lymstone Herald and village website. The group was a diverse one. Members came from different parts of the village, and ranged from someone who was born in the village to someone who moved here three years ago.

Participants:

Ross Albon
Liz Griffiths
Diana Letcher
Brian Mather
Don Mildenhall (Community Champion)
Jenny Moon
Jim Morris
Steve Parks
Bryan Stewart

Note: this report is a general summary of a wide ranging discussion. It does not necessarily represent the views of any individual participant.

The group focused on three key questions.

1. What makes the 'Lymstone Community'?

Some important amenities / facilities including:

- Shop and Post Office
- Train station
- Surgery and dispensary
- Pubs
- School
- Allotments
- Range of community meeting venues

- Travelling library

There were concerns about the future of some of these things:

- The shop needs more support, 'not just to buy a pint of milk'
- There are concerns about the future viability of the Post Office
- The school gets good support from the PTFA. It is successful and the number of pupils has increased. An interesting point was raised that maybe it had got to its optimum size in terms of pupils.
- There is a lot of pressure on community meeting venues, including the village hall. However there was a view that this pressure could actually stimulate activity
- Not everyone knows about the travelling library and there was a concern that 'if you don't use it you lose it'

The wide diversity of people

There is good range of ages and the general perception was that there is a healthy mix between the traditional inhabitants who bring a sense of continuity, retired professionals who bring a vibrancy and range of interests, and younger couples with children. It is important to retain a working population, which helps the sense that the village is a community and not a dormitory town.

There are lots of things for people to do in the village, and for some there is no need to leave for entertainment - 'It's got what I need'. This is because of the diverse range and interests of people, and the range of groups, clubs and societies.

However there are some issues:

- A concern that the influx of retired professionals pushes out young people
- A lack of facilities for young people, especially teenagers
- Limited work opportunities in & around Exeter for people reaching 18-23 means many move away and may not wish to return
- Younger couples might not find it easy to access social and leisure activities
- A perception that the village is not as 'nice' as it was 20 or 30 years ago. Children of the traditional village families who have moved out do not want to return because of changes in the make up of the village. (But not easy to pin down what 'nice' means).

The focus group recognised that much of our thinking was based on perception, and that it would be helpful to have accurate demographic data to back up assumptions.

The group was concerned that some parts of the parish might not share the sense of 'community' including:

- The camp and service families – a sense of 'passing through')
- Jacksons Meadow - new arrivals; layout of estate may limit integration.
- Glebelands – situation on edge of village
- Courtlands Lane, and east of A376 - edge of village

There was a wish to understand more about this. Communication could be improved. The most effective form of communication is posters - 'the weekly battle for telegraph pole space'. Does this work in all parts of the Parish?

There was a view that to have a sense of community a village like Lymptone needs a critical mass, and that there is an optimum population size.

A strong feeling of community safety

There is a low level of crime, and people feel safe. Children can play in the streets, people can leave things unattended. The low level of crime is partly because of the lack of through traffic.

Some important intangibles

Finally there is a collective feeling of being 'a village', a sense of coherence and pulling together. People expect to get to know each other, and value the fact that 'you can walk down the street and people smile at you'.

2. What's missing?

The following might add to the sense of community:

- A community room with internet access. This might also include a library, reading room and a museum which could display the village's heritage.
- Sheltered housing so older people can stay in village.
- A central agency to promote voluntary work in the village – perhaps something similar to Topsham's Estuary League of Friends.
- Participation in Britain in Bloom
- Village swimming pool
- 20mph speed limit / traffic calming
- Mobile library coming at a time suitable for school children to access it
- Small industrial units or lock ups for storage (on the outskirts of the village) to allow working people to live and work here.
- Promotion of the services available from local tradespeople
- Improvements to the Village Hall Committee Room and better facilities for the preschool. Funding could come from a small increase in the parish precept.
- Wider community involvement in the work of the Parish Council. There was a perception that PC meetings were not inspiring.

3. What we don't want

- Coalescence which would destroy the sense of community
- Insensitive development e.g. at the Nursery which is in the centre of the village (this doesn't mean no development)
- No graffiti or loss of respect for people
- More traffic in the village, or through traffic that would affect people's ability to chat on corners etc
- Too many holiday homes (although some are useful since they bring business to the pubs etc).
- Houses with high gates
- Loss of the Post Office, shop, station church, and community police presence

We didn't have time to discuss the Herald and the websites as means of communicating village news and adding to the sense of community. One participant commented after the meeting that 'the newly launched website is now in its second year and has the potential to be an important tool for communicating parish council news, village news and comments from our community'.

Appendix

Two written contributions were received from focus group members after the event:

- a) Jenny Moon, on what makes a community (or a *village* community) and how we can ensure our community evolves, is sustainable, and considers all elements.
- b) Diana Letcher on the important role the churches play in the community.

Mark Robertson, Facilitator, 30th July 2012.