

Report from Environment Focus Group

Version history:

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

The focus group met on 4th July 2012 at the Village Hall. Participants volunteered following the original community consultation on 18 April, and publicity in the Lympstone Herald and village website. The group was a diverse one.

Participants:

Mona Moudry
Steve Parks
Diana Letcher
Judith Carter
Kathy Rogers
Becks Pearson
Lucy Morris
Jim Morris
Helen Dimond (Environment Champion)

(Alan Burton was unable to attend in person but submitted written comments).

Note: There were a range of different views in the group and these are recorded here. In my opinion further discussion would have been required to establish whether there was consensus on some key issues e.g. whether there is any conflict between 'aesthetics' and measures to improve sustainability/combat climate change.

There was possibly less chance to discuss issues of climate change than the group would have wished.

In this summary of the discussion I have attempted to group issues against the headings in the Design Statement where possible, so some comments may be reproduced out of the order in which they were made at the meeting.

What are the most important landscape features in the parish (places and views)

The most important features are:

- The foreshore, in the village and along the whole boundary of the parish
- The harbour
- Candy's Field, Cliff Field, Avenue Field, Frog Meadow, Mill Field, fields at top of Church Path, fields at top of Glebelands, fields opposite Sowden Farm
- Large Gardens which help to keep the centre of the village green
- The allotments

- Footpaths
- Area around the 'waterfall'
- Streams, rivers and watercourses
- Trees, especially the mature ones
- The natural hedges
- Lanes down to foreshore
- Middlecombe back of St Peters
- Lympstone Common
- Views over the estuary from the lanes

The group discussed what made these features important. They are part of what makes a 'village'. It's not suburbia but has greenness and people are able to roam. There is space, especially for children.

It is important to keep the meadows and green fields, or at least have a variety of crops.

The group wondered whether some spaces e.g. Mill Field could be better maintained. But then wondered whether the fact that places were not always maintained was good – it gives soft edges. Importance of natural grazing and maintaining the natural hedgerows.

People are entitled to make changes to their gardens, and we should respect this.

It is important to keep the green spaces, and access difficulties makes them unsuitable for development

Instead of paving drives for cars it would be preferable if people just put in tracks. This is less unsightly and avoids the environmental impact (e.g. water run off).

There is an issue about growing night time light pollution over estuary

Village Design Statement

This is a good piece of work although in need of some revision/updating.

3) The conservation area

Concern that people are breaking the rules in the conservation area – altering heights, different heights, changing the appearance of properties not enough monitoring

4) Building forms

There was general agreement with the statement in the Design Statement that 'There is room for imaginative new design, sympathetic to the traditional buildings of Lympstone'.

There is definitely a place for mixing the old with the new

However such new design does need to blend in. A good example of this blending is the Lookout where natural materials blend in with the landscape. Other large new modern designs are not so sympathetic; problems include

- Light pollution on the estuary
- Buildings out of character – too ‘blocky’ , too big for the surrounding area

However some houses that don’t ‘look’ as nice may be very environmentally friendly and we should support the use of economically efficient materials that blend in.

6) Roofs

There is no mention of solar panels in the Design Statement. The general feeling was that they are not pretty but people will get used to them and adapt to the changing roofscape. Better, more subtle designs are becoming available from the US but these may not be as effective. Even if they are seen as detrimental to the appearance of the village there seemed a consensus that they must at least be tolerated in the interests of the environment, although there was a view that newer designs will be effective and will enable environment and appearance to work together.

More strongly, there was a view that solar panels are symbolic of other energy saving devices and that as a community we should prize all such measures as increasing sustainability and affordability. In turn this will attract young families to the village, to take advantage of lower energy bills.

7) Street furniture

There was little concern about signposts, although excessive signs are starting to appear around the cycle path. People didn’t like the metal telegraph poles. There is an unsightly derelict telephone box near the married quarters. We could do with more dog bins, especially at Sowden End but they do need to be emptied regularly.

8) Boundaries

The natural hedges were an important environmental feature. There was a view that flailing hedges was unsightly and that the more traditional approach of laying hedges should be adopted. This encourages healthy growth.

10) Estuaryside

Should we ask the Environment Agency to make improvements where the brook flows into the harbour ?

11) Footpaths

It is important to keep existing footpaths in their current state. In particular there should be no more tarmac on footpaths. If the surface needs improving then natural materials should be used.

People were unclear about where responsibility for maintaining footpaths, and public rights of way lies.

It would be nice to have additional footpaths e.g. frog meadow, between Summer Lane and Wooton Lane. The Design Statement should specifically mention the East Devon Way

13) Trees and hedges

Trees, especially the mature trees, are an important feature of the landscape. Need advice from East Devon Tree Officer. TPOs are not always enforced. This should be monitored.

New trees need to be planted when trees fall down or are damaged. New planting should be indigenous trees - plant little saplings each year on an ongoing basis to maintain tree cover. ED tree officer needs to look at TPOs not always enforced.

There is concern that erosion of the cliffs will lead to loss of trees. How rapid is cliff erosion? Particular concern about damage to trees on cliff by development. Loss of trees here will ruin the views

What can we do locally to combat climate change (the group had limited time to discuss this)

- In Wadebridge it is estimated that households spend £1000 per year on energy bills. They are looking at ways to share energy. Could that money be invested locally to supply fuel for local use? We should look at the longevity of what we are doing.
- As a community could we invest in alternative energy sources e.g. contribute to cost of a bank of solar panels? This is a good idea but where would you put it? Funding could come from the Parish Council precept. Important not to dismiss this idea out of hand – put it somewhere it can't be seen.
- What about wind turbines?
- Is tidal power an option?
- Would hydro power be feasible e.g. in the land behind Frog Meadow?
- Could we benefit from a car sharing scheme or car club as in Bristol? There is one in Topsham.
- EDDC conservation officer doesn't give enough weight to sustainability
- What can be done in the village to increase environmental awareness – used to be environmental walks organised by a Parish Councillor
- Air pollution is a big problem, particularly from car fumes in a valley. 20 mph would make it worse.

Appendix

A written contribution was received from Diana Letcher after the Focus Group suggesting a number of other stakeholders whose views should be considered, and further suggestions for combatting climate change.

Mark Robertson, Facilitator, 30th July 2012