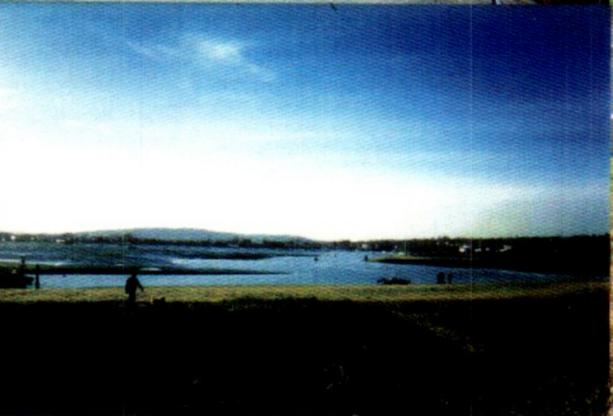
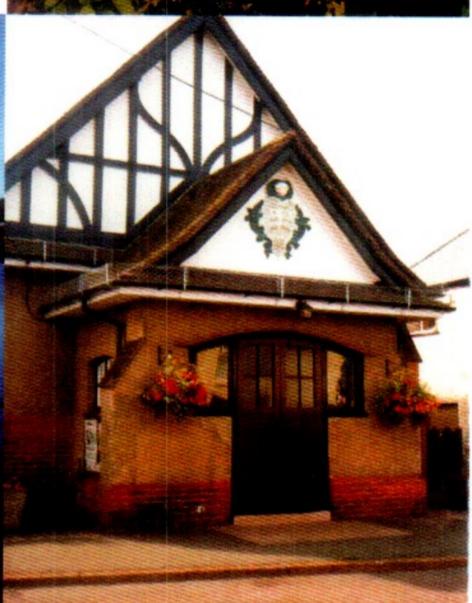
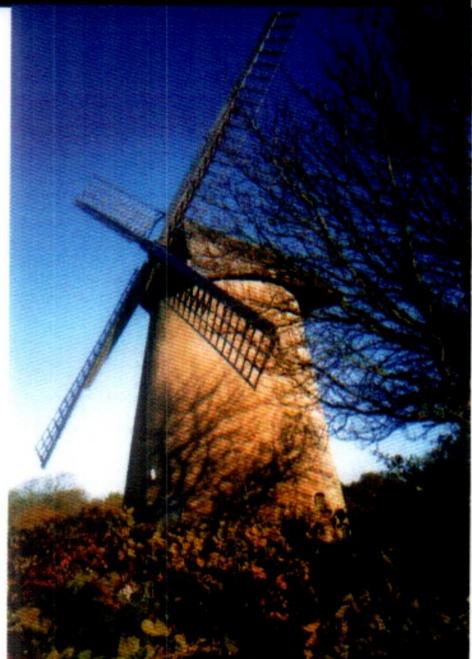


VIEWPOINT BEMBRIDGE A PLAN FOR THE FUTURE



Viewpoint Bembridge: A plan for the future

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1. INTRODUCTION

This document presents the strategy for how Bembridge residents wish to see their village develop over the next 10 to 15 years.

Following a Government initiative to encourage villages to have a greater input into how their own localities develop, the Countryside Agency started the Parish Plan scheme.

This is the response from the people of Bembridge, Isle of Wight.

While many of the issues raised are beyond the direct control of the Parish Council or any other statutory bodies, it does give an impetus and direction for implementation and discussion.

2. GUIDELINES

The Countryside Agency suggested the Guidelines in its documentation. Support was given by the Isle of Wight Rural Community Council (IWRCC) and one of its Development Officers who was funded by the Countryside Agency to assist in rural community projects. The Plan had to work within the overall Government Planning Guidelines, but identify key local issues. It was a requirement of the Countryside Agency that two Parish Councillors worked with the project group which had by now adopted the name "Viewpoint Bembridge". The Viewpoint Bembridge team arranged two workshops to raise awareness of the major planning, housing and environmental issues, as well as to consider how to overcome the obstacles to developing the plan successfully.

The Development Officer also attended several Committee meetings to give further guidance. A grant from the Countryside Agency of up to £3000 was made, subject to local funding in cash or in kind equivalent to a further 40% being raised with a further 5% being contributed by the Parish Council. The project began in June 2003 and the timescale was to produce the Plan by the end of January 2005.

3. INTRODUCTION TO BEMBRIDGE

Bembridge lies at the most easterly point of the Isle of Wight. A recent archeological dig at Yaverland on the outskirts of the village has revealed that the Bembridge area has been occupied since the Stone Age.

Originally a tiny fishing and farming community, and a part of the Parish of Brading, Bembridge is now home to nearly 4000 people.

Covering an area of 915 hectares the village was at one time almost cut off from the rest of the Island. From 1562 various attempts were made to reclaim the Haven between Brading and Bembridge. It was not until 1874 that an embankment carrying a road and railway line was constructed linking it with nearby St Helens.

Surrounded on three sides by water Bembridge has seven kilometres of coastline and enjoys pleasant rural surroundings to landward. Its harbour, protected from the elements by Culver Down to the south and by a sand spit to the north, provides a safe haven for yachts and the sand dunes on The Point offer a pleasant picnic area. Bembridge Harbour boasts a sailing club, a yacht club, two marinas, and moorings for over 500 boats. On the hill overlooking the harbour stands Bembridge Windmill dating from 1702. No longer in use it is now owned by the National Trust and open to visitors. Three ecumenically linked churches – Church of England, Roman Catholic and Methodist – provide for the spiritual needs of the community. Their congregations meet together frequently for celebrations and services. Together, they produce the Bembridge Parish Magazine and organise the annual Bembridge Festival during the last week of May.

The village hall is in constant use for bazaars, coffee mornings, keep-fit classes, art societies, exhibitions, and drama productions. Built in 1910, the village hall is to be enlarged and modernised in 2005. Nearby the Church hall, The Cloisters hosts a popular Luncheon Club for older people. The Bembridge Youth and Community Centre is at the southern end of the village. The youth of the village have club meetings here and it is also home to the Isle of Wight Youth Concert Band.

Bembridge has a thriving business community, many of whom are represented by the award-winning Bembridge Business Association (BBA). The village benefits from a wide range of shops and services. On the southern outskirts of the village is Bembridge Airport, home to the world-famous Britten-Norman Islander aircraft. Bembridge Airport offers a welcome to visiting light aircraft.

Striking a balance between residential and commercial interests, Bembridge offers a variety of educational opportunities and supports a full spectrum of recreational, intellectual and charitable activities.

For the last ten years, it has been twinned with Plédran in Brittany and exchange visits take place every year.

The Village Plan aims to outline the general character of Bembridge and to highlight those qualities and features which are particularly valued by its residents. It also sets out their hopes and ideas for the future improvement and development of what is *their village*.

4. PROCESS

4.1 Planning

A Committee was formed to lead the project, gather the views of the villagers and then develop and publish the Plan. The names of the committee members are in Appendix 1.

The stages to develop the Plan were identified and a schedule prepared to achieve the Plan's milestones. (Appendix 2). Essentially the plan was to:

Establish two stages of consultation, qualitative and quantitative, and to identify and prioritise the problems.

Run an "Open Forum" to discuss the results.

Set up workshops to identify solutions to the problems and key partners to achieve the solutions.

Present the findings and seek commitment from the Parish Council and other partners to take the Plan forward.

4.2 Consultation - Qualitative research

Bembridge is a very active village. There are several means of communication within the parish. These include society meetings, an award-winning community website –bembridge.com, the "Village Talk" section of the Isle of Wight County Press weekly newspaper, the Parish Magazine, three public notice boards, shop windows and word of mouth. The Bembridge Business Association produces an informative annual guide in full colour, which is distributed free of charge to all residents, and made available to visitors.

The aims of the project were explained in a series of talks given at meetings of local societies at which volunteers were invited to join the Viewpoint Bembridge committee. Local media were then used to announce two public meetings for October and November 2003, when the aims of the Project were presented and views sought as to how best the aims of the project could be achieved.

From this exercise several strands of the consultation process emerged:

A qualitative questionnaire was developed to prompt discussion (Appendix 3)

Single-use cameras were given to 20 adults and children, to record what they considered good and bad features of Bembridge. The exercise generated 480 photos.

Middle and Primary school teachers were enlisted to generate views from the village's school children.

Teenagers at the Youth and Community Centre in Steyne Park were given the qualitative questionnaire, which they then discussed with the Youth Leader.

Over a period of several weeks people attending events at the village hall were approached to discuss the questionnaire.

Tourist hotels and retirement homes were asked to contribute their views.

Members of the BBA were asked for their views and invited to highlight issues of concern to them.

4.3 Consultation – Quantified Research (Viewpoint Bembridge)

A questionnaire was developed to cover the main issues highlighted in the qualitative stage. (Appendix 4). The exercise, called Viewpoint Bembridge, involved delivering a questionnaire to every household in Bembridge to represent the household's views. This was to avoid multiple completions and avoid bias.

Careful arrangements were made to ensure all households received a copy of the questionnaire. To encourage a good response, arrangements were made to call to collect completed forms or to give details of 'drop-off' locations where forms could be handed in.

As a consequence the return rate of forms was nearly 35% instead of the 10%-15% usually recorded by similar exercises held elsewhere.

In practice:

2133 questionnaires were delivered.

394 were collected the following day.

A further 348 were put in the collection boxes.

Total response: 742 = 34.8%.

This meant that for all major issues there was a representative level of response.

One of the Committee's main concerns was that response might only come from the high proportion of over 60's in the village. (43% of the village population). To monitor this part of the questionnaire asked for the age groups represented in the household. This was not completed by everyone, but for those that did, it showed that responses were received from households with under 25's present, but there were only 4 in this category not living with parents (which might well be comment on the lack of affordable housing for the young). The table below shows the response by age group compared to the 2001 Census.

These views were then collated and presented together with the photographs at a planned public exhibition held in the Methodist Church

CENSUS RESEARCH RESPONSE

Age group	%	Age Group	%
16 - 19	4.3	17 - 24	6.5
20 - 29	6.3	25 - 40	9.6
30 - 59	42.0	41 - 54	17.0
60 -74	26.0	55 - 65	26.5
75+	21.0	66 - 75	22.9
		75+	17.6

(A full set of the results is in Appendix 5, and will be discussed under each topic heading through the Plan.)

hall during early summer of 2004. The exhibition entitled 'Planning Bembridge', was advertised using local media and banners displayed at key road junctions in the village. More than 400 people attended from the total of over 2,100 households in the village, some 400 of which are second homes. Those attending included permanent residents, many

second-home owners, and representatives from adjoining Parish Councils.

All visitors to the event were invited to write their comments and opinions on 'Post-it' notes and then fix them to the relevant display boards to promote interest and involvement and immediate feedback. All these comments were later collated to provide more data for the plan.

In addition to the Viewpoint Bembridge material the Youth and Community Centre displayed their plans for improving and developing the Centre. An alternative suggested road layout for the village centre was displayed that might help improve the traffic flow at the cost of some of the trees. The Bembridge and St Helens Harbour Association (BASHHA) put on a display showing the changes to the harbour and its surrounds over the years.

Progress on the consultation was posted on bembridge.com (which also hosted a dedicated "chat-room" for Viewpoint Bembridge), in Village Talk and in the Parish Magazine.

A further two-day open exhibition was then held in the Village Hall over a weekend to present the top-line results. The results were presented on display boards, with the original photos and the comments made on Post-it notes. Discussions were encouraged to explore and refine the results or add other issues. A further 300 people attended this event.

Workshops were then held, using the results and discussion generated at the exhibition, to identify and prioritise key issues. Solutions were developed and partners to be responsible for developing action for each topic were identified.

4.4 Parish Council

The results of the research and the outline Plan were presented to the Parish Council, which approved its main direction.

4.5 Publishing the Plan

The Plan is being unveiled at a launch event in the village in spring 2005.

To ensure everyone knows the key contents an A3 leaflet summarising the Plan is being circulated to all houses in the village. (A copy of this appears as the executive summary to this document). The distribution date will be announced in the main media to increase awareness of the leaflet. Feedback sessions will be held for those societies that contributed to the Plan.

Research results have also been distributed to those who can make good use of the information to liaise with the authorities, or to use in support of grant and funding applications.

Full copies of the Plan will also be available in the village library and as a PDF file on bembridge.com for those who wish to download it.

5. KEY ISSUES

5.1 Questionnaire

Bembridge is a lively rural village, on the coast, with an active harbour and a small private airport. It is currently well served with shops and amenities all year round. Its economy, once fishing and farming, is now essentially tourism. When asked 'What do you most like about the Village?' very high levels of response were received favouring the combination of village life, countryside and harbour.

WHAT DO YOU MOST LIKE ABOUT BEMBRIDGE?

Question	% of total	Answers	Total	25-54	55-74	75+
1	Most like	96.4	716	%	%	%
1.1	Community		502	78	59	69
1.2	Country		560	78	75	79
1.3	Harbour		476	67	68	74
1.4	Beaches		559	78	87	81
1.5	Shops		423	59	49	61
1.6	Situation		389	54	57	57
1.7	Other		71			

When asked about the importance of the local environment, again high levels of response were received.

VERY IMPORTANT TO THE ENVIRONMENT

Question	25-54	55-74	75+	
	%	%	%	
3.1	Access road from St Helens	71	79	74
3.2	Access road by the airport	67	73	63
3.3	Beaches	86	84	82
3.4	Coastal walks	79	77	68
3.5	The harbour	73	74	72
3.6	Open countryside	83	85	78
3.7	Open footpaths/bridleways	76	80	68
3.8	Balance of village life and tourists	79	79	82

So, when asked, "what are the two major issues that need to be tackled to ensure Bembridge's future?" it is not surprising that the top two were:

The need for a controlled development and planning strategy for the village that aims to maintain the rural character of the village, its shops, amenities and its community life, but not allowing uncontrolled in-fill development or a dramatic increase in second homes. (The Village Design Statement (VDS) has already addressed this issue although its importance cannot be emphasised enough.)

To keep the Harbour as an operating, viable harbour against sea erosion and silting up, maintain the access road (Embankment Road)

across it, improve the situation regarding untreated sewage being discharged into it and improve its visual aspect and access.

The other important issues were:-

To improve parking near the shops.

Maintain traffic flow.

To improve facilities for the youth and younger age groups of the village, especially those in Steyne Park.

To encourage and positively promote the use of village amenities, such as the shops, bank, library, businesses, as well as the Community Centre and Village Hall, to ensure they remain viable.

The purpose of the Viewpoint Bembridge plan is to provide the development strategy for the village, so hopefully that major concerns can be met. Each of the other points will be tackled in individual sections.

6. BEMBRIDGE HARBOUR

Until the mid 1800's, Bembridge was an island, approached by one road over a bridge at Yaverland. The sea flowed into the valley formed by Bembridge and St. Helens up to Brading where the East Yar River then discharged into the estuary. A Victorian entrepreneur saw the opportunity offered by the emergence of the railways to build an embankment across the estuary from St Helens to Bembridge to create a port now occupied by Bembridge Marina, and to give rail and a second road access to Bembridge.

From that point Bembridge flourished as a village, with increased marine employment, ferry services and a major hotel bringing a growth in both holiday homes and tourism.

Successive railway companies maintained both Embankment Road and the harbour, and undertook the dredging needed to keep the harbour open.

Inevitably the main sewers did not extend along the railway embankment.

The railway line closed in 1953. By the 1970's, boat draughts had increased and this combined with continual silting up of the harbour, led to the closure of St. Helens port, and the current Marina began to be developed.

However the harbour and Embankment Road together led to the creation of:

- A sailing centre catering for a sailing club and yacht club plus visiting yachts,

- A successful beach holiday resort with beaches that face both into and out of the harbour and an attractive environment.

- Marine businesses, shops, restaurants, hotels, pubs and other accommodation providers that all depend on the tourist trade to remain viable, but provide the infrastructure the village needs all through the year.

- An RSPB bird sanctuary, a harbour and coastline in a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), surrounded by Sites of Special Scientific Interest. (SSSI).

6.1 Consequences of the loss of the harbour

Without a viable harbour, the economy and vitality of Bembridge village would be seriously damaged.

Following the rail closures British Rail sold the Harbour. The Bembridge Harbour Improvement Company purchased it, a development company that controls the leases for land and the moorings that comprise the harbour. Global warming and rising water levels in the East Yar River, as well as the sea, has resulted in a greater level of erosion and silting. However, increased pressure on Isle of Wight Council (IWC) funding and private ownership has meant that the coastal defences (sea walls, groynes at the harbour entrance and on the beaches on both sides of the harbour) have not been maintained. An original policy of the Environment Agency not to maintain the sea defences but to 'let nature take its course' has been temporarily amended to "hold the line" until a long-term survey has been carried out. (See 6.3 The Harbour Plan below).

Not surprisingly, residents of Bembridge are extremely concerned about these issues and the prospect of what is now the primary road into the

village (Embankment Road), being subject to serious erosion and possibly eventual loss if the Duver is allowed to wash away.

VERY CONCERNED

	25-54	55-74	75+
Q 4 How concerned are you about			
water erosion around beaches/Duver	59	65	55
Q5 How concerned are you about			
4.1 Coastal path collapse	74	80	80
4.2 Disappearing sand from beaches	78	76	70
4.3 Sewage in the harbour	90	89	94
4.4 Harbour silting up so no boat access	73	73	74
4.5 Visual approach around harbour	71	75	73
4.6 Litter on beaches	85	81	78
4.7 Poor state of footpaths/bridleways	57	63	59
Q6 Concern about Embankment road erosion	85	90	84
Q7 Safety of Airport road	52	56	61

So while the future prosperity of Bembridge is somewhat dependent on a viable harbour, the village now finds itself at the mercy of a series of third-party interests, with their own agendas:-

The Bembridge Harbour Improvement Company - that wants to increase its revenues, for example, by increasing the number of houseboat berths leased (with no guarantee of main sewage connection) and proposing to introduce harbour dues.

English Nature that wants to create a silted environment for wading sea birds as the result of an EU Directive.

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) - that has recently purchased the floodplain inland up to Brading as a wetland bird reserve and a haven for rare plants.

The Isle of Wight Council has a limited budget for coastal defence and a lot of coast to defend.

Against this background, Viewpoint Bembridge has highlighted five major action points.

6.2 The Harbour Plan Ongoing priority - longer term

The Environment Agency and the IWC are about to start a survey to recommend on a 50 year plan for the whole of the East Yar River Valley which extends from Newchurch through to the harbour. A similar coastal study hopes to be granted funding for the harbour and adjacent area to work to a 100 year plan. It is due to start work in 2005 and the study's terms of reference are being developed. This will include a socio-economic study and it will be more than two years before its conclusions are seen. All landowners and interested parties will be fully consulted. The Working Group formed in Bembridge and St. Helens is being kept informed and will continue to issue regular newsletters. The aim of the group is to:-

Secure the long-term viability of the harbour and

Enhance the environmental aspects of the area.

Research results have already been given to the group, which includes two Parish Councillors, an IWC Councillor together with representatives from BASHA and BBA.

Actions:

Maintain liaison through the Steering Group and monitor long-term survey recommendations and socio-economic study and implications for the village.

Understand the specific responsibilities of the harbour owner under the Harbour Act and ensure those responsibilities are fulfilled.

Recommend sub-groups as needed in light of results.

Partners:

Bembridge Parish Council, IWC, BASHA, BBA, Bembridge Harbour Improvement Company.

6.3 Sewage - on-going priority - longer term

There is no sewer around the harbour serving the houseboats. It is not currently unlawful for boats to discharge raw sewage into a harbour.

More than 90% of survey respondents said they very concerned about untreated sewage being pumped directly into the harbour. Combined with increased silting, the effluent is causing major problems with the quality and safety of bathing water in the harbour. Visiting boats also add to the problem.

Although the Bembridge Harbour Improvement Company has offered to provide sewage treatment in return for dramatically increased leaseholds, it is unlikely that the houseboat owners will agree as one of the advantages of a houseboat is its cheaper cost.

Actions:

To approach Southern Water and IWC Environment Services to conduct water tests from the primary point of view of human health.

To approach the local MP to ask for these tests to be carried out and followed through.

If necessary, to persuade the local MP to reactivate a Bill to make it illegal for boats to discharge sewage into a harbour.

Partners:

Bembridge Parish Council, IWC Councillors, MP, BASHA, Bembridge & St Helens Harbour Steering Group, Bembridge Harbour Improvement Company

6.4 Visual aspects and access – ongoing priority – short and long-term

There are two different aspects to this issue. The first is the appearance of the harbour from Embankment Road .The second concerns both the access to and the visual attractiveness of the beaches inside and outside the harbour.

6.4.1 Harbour appearance

Harbour appearance. The Redwing sheds at Bembridge Sailing Club are listed buildings. The houseboats also located on the Bembridge side of the harbour are not subject to Planning Control or Regulations whilst they are floating. However anything land-based or fixed is. This means there must be a combined approach to ensure that the houseboats are

safe and that the harbour is attractive for all parties.

Actions:

Bembridge Parish Council to continue monitoring planning applications for future land-based developments.

The IWC Development Control Department to take full account of the VDS.

IWC to ensure harbour owners comply with their statutory duties and take necessary enforcement action if required.

Partners:

Bembridge Parish Council, IWC, Bembridge Harbour Improvement Company.

6.4.2 The Point and Beaches

Many respondents (85%) were very concerned about beach litter. Some of this comes from use of the beaches and some is washed ashore. The core problem is that the land is privately owned, although the public is permitted to use it. This means the IWC is not authorised to supply items such as litterbins and toilets or arrange for regular beach cleaning. Whilst it is appreciated that BASHA does organise two litter-cleaning sessions a year, this can only be on a voluntary basis. (More than 200 respondents in the survey offered to help with beach cleaning). Additionally, there is no path onto the beach, for the less able. This would also be a welcome amenity for residents and visitors alike.

Action:

To organise a meeting of landowners to explore ways that could provide litterbins or litter clearance, and to investigate the possibility and viability of boardwalk around the Point.

Partners:

Bembridge Parish Council, beach landowners, BASHA.

6.5 Harbour Silting & Beach Erosion - Ongoing priority - short and long-term

This is a major issue. Some 92% of respondents were very or slightly concerned about the Harbour silting up so that boats could not use it. Equally 96% were very or slightly concerned about the sand levels being eroded from the beaches. A viable harbour and attractive beaches are vital to maintain the tourist economy.

The Bembridge Harbour Improvement Company is required to remove sufficient silt to keep the channel open, but not much more. The Company also owns the long groyne opposite St Helens beach. Other groynes that protect the beach and allow sand to build up are the responsibility of individual beach landowners. The objective therefore is to keep the harbour viable for boats and to maintain the sand levels on the beaches.

Actions:

As for 6.2

Partners:

Bembridge Parish Council, St.Helens Parish Council, IWC, BASHA, marine businesses and clubs, Bembridge Harbour Improvement Company.

6.6 Coastal Footpaths and Beaches – On-going priority – longer term

The condition of the coastal footpaths around the village is considered to be a long-term priority. Nearly all (97%) of those who responded to the questionnaire had concerns about the footpaths, which are used by residents and tourists alike. The primary concern is erosion.

In addition, 61% were very concerned about the state of footpaths and bridleways in general, and 32% slightly concerned. Bembridge's rural environment and the ability to walk, ride and enjoy it, is important to the people who live and visit here. The issues, which need to be addressed, are slowing erosion, rebuilding the coastal paths and ensuring that they are clear and safe.

Because the land and beaches around Bembridge are in private ownership, beach conservation can be difficult.

The coastline comes under the control of English Nature, which pursues a strict policy of allowing nature to take its course. The collapse of the coastal footpath is mainly caused by erosion and occurs because the underlying strata of blue slipper clay, is exposed by the action of the sea, particularly in stormy winter weather conditions. Capillary action draws water into the blue slipper clay, which enables soil and trees above it to slide down onto the beaches

The sea carries trees and soil away and occasionally the trees can constitute a danger to shipping in the Solent. Because the footpath runs only a few feet away from the coastline, erosion has led to the loss of several long stretches, making it dangerous and impossible to negotiate at high tide.

One example of the loss incurred by erosion is evidenced at Under Tyne, an area below Tyne Hall, where the spring water was reputedly once so pure that it kept fresh on voyages all the way to the Caribbean. Erosion has now turned the spring into boggy ground and it can no longer be used.

The trees on the coastline form part of the belt of trees subject to preservation orders, which surround Bembridge. They protect the area from the prevailing winds allowing the village to enjoy a micro-climate in which the village's renowned mimosa trees can flourish.

The IWC has built a narrow promenade and coastal protection for a short stretch of the beach at Forelands where there is a beach café and an historic inn. Because there have been considerable landslides on the south of the Isle of Wight, financial resources have been diverted to repair and reinstate the roads used by tourists. Ways should be found to obtain IWC and Government funds to continue the work begun by the Council on the Bembridge coastline.

Actions:

To organise meetings with landowners, and to explore ways in which the coast and beaches can be better protected. It is as much in their interest to get their co-operation since it is their land that they are losing.

To liaise with IWC and, if necessary, use the Parish Council lengthsman and local volunteers to maintain footpaths (75 responders in the survey volunteered to help clear paths).

To persuade English Nature to 'hold the line' as opposed to its current policy of 'letting nature take its course'.

Partners:

Bembridge Parish Council, St Helens Parish Council, IWC Bembridge Councillors, IWC, local volunteer groups, walking and rambling groups, Isle of Wight Tourism, local landowners, English Nature.

7. TRAFFIC AND TRANSPORT

7.1 Traffic flow and Parking

Improved traffic flow through the village centre was high on the list of priorities (73%) for respondents, whilst 59% wanted accessible parking outside shops. The major concern was the junction of High Street and Foreland Road in the village centre. Many wished for a central car park but this really is not a possibility. Most people were opposed to changing Church Street into a two-way road, allowing traffic to bypass shops.

Two thirds (66% of respondents) think that more yellow lines are acceptable and action has already been taken to prevent parking where obstruction frequently occurs.

Three quarters of respondents (75% overall and 78% of car drivers) think that a two-hour waiting limit in the village centre would be beneficial.

7.2 Transport

The survey revealed that 78% of respondents own at least one car. Transport, therefore, appears not to be a problem for the majority. Those without cars find difficulty in visiting the Doctor's surgery in St. Helens and St Mary's Hospital in Newport. There are quite a few people in the village who now do drive people to and from the hospital and only charge to cover their petrol and general running costs but it does seem clear that they are not generally known.

35% of all respondents (43% of non-car owners) want more frequent buses. Reliable, frequent and affordable public transport is an important environmental consideration, particularly in an area with a high percentage of older and disabled people. Whilst a voluntary organisation, the Bembridge Friendship Circle provides a minibus service for travel both within and outside of the village, the vehicle is in urgent need of replacement. A community bus service, such as adopted in other villages, should be urgently considered.

Actions:

Parish Council to investigate the possibility of a Village Transport survey.

Partners:

Parish Council, IWC Councillors for Bembridge.

7.3 Pavements and Pedestrian Crossings

Many pavements in the village are in a poor state of repair and action is needed to address the problem. More ramps should be provided and there should be increased access for the disabled. There were requests for more roadside seats and a significant number said there was a need for a pedestrian crossing near the post office.

Actions:

To encourage IWC and Parish Councillors to make strong representation to the IWC Highways Department concerning the state of the pavements. Considering the high population of older residents in the village, Bembridge should be a high priority for pavement repairs.

Parish Council to continue to fight for a pedestrian crossing adjacent to the Post Office in Foreland Road, despite an earlier refusal by the IWC.

Parish Council to take action on placing more seats in Foreland Road.

Partners:

Parish Council, IWC Councillors for Bembridge, IWC.

8 AMENITIES

8.1 Shops and Library

Bembridge has a thriving number of businesses, including restaurants, pubs, hairdressers, newsagents, a baker, the Post Office, and a Bank. The importance of the village shops in this community cannot be over-stated. For many, they are the focal point in village life providing invaluable services. This fact is borne out with the answers to the questionnaire.

94% of respondents said they use the both the High Street and Lane End shops. Almost the same number the Post Office, Bank and Library. More than half (51%) use the boating suppliers on the harbour.

The Bank was threatened with closure in 1999 but collective community action prevented this from happening. The BBA co-ordinated the campaign and has continued to play a key role in the business activities of the village.

Local Post Offices and shops continue to be threatened by competition from supermarkets, and closures could have a significant impact on village life as demonstrated in other parts of the Island. Reflecting this, 84% of respondents said that they would be very concerned about any closures. The loss of the hardware shop in Lane End in 2004 is having an impact. People now have to travel to Ryde for hardware and garden requisites which may mean that other shopping is done there at the same time.

Bembridge Library plays an important role with 84% of respondents saying they use it. With internet access now in place, many students of all ages are making good use of the facilities. The Library also stages a number of local art exhibitions, which are always very popular.

The survey revealed a demand for a mobile library particularly from those in sheltered housing. This is now in hand and action will be taken sometime in the New Year.

Action:

Use them or lose them is the main answer to community concerns over the shops and the library. Sometimes it might mean paying a little extra, but the cost could be far greater if they go.

Partners:

All villagers and shop owners, BBA.

8.2 Childcare Facilities

Access to childcare in the village was high on the list of priorities of parents. Currently, the village has only a few options for parents, the Windmills Nursery School, Footprints and a registered childminder to help with those below school age. As well as after-school clubs at the local primary and middle schools held during term time, there is also a baby and toddler group which meets weekly at the Methodist Hall. Footprints offers a childminding service for pre-school children in a home environment. Apart from these facilities, parents have to rely on family and friends for their childcare needs.

Many respondents to the survey stated that they would like affordable homes for young families and if these wishes are to be fulfilled, childcare facilities and access to them will need to be improved.

The survey revealed parental concern over the lack of early morning care for their children. For example, parents working in the island's capital, Newport (10 miles away) said it was extremely difficult to find convenient childcare. School holidays also prove another difficulty.

The Parish Council has already stated that it recognises the importance of having good childcare facilities and will support any viable plans that improve facilities for young families to allow them to be able to work. To this end, the Council will investigate the feasibility of supporting holiday clubs at Steyne Park for school age children.

The Windmills Pre-school has been offered a mobile building which they plan to turn into a nursery unit allowing them to take much younger children. There has been a difficulty in obtaining temporary planning permission for the siting of this facility in Steyne Park due to objections from Sport England. Residents were asked if they were happy with the siting of the baby unit in the questionnaire. Over 60% of respondents were extremely happy for this to go ahead with only 9.6% not happy with this decision.

The BYCC Management committee has expressed an interest in holding after-school clubs at the Community Centre once it has been refurbished.

The Parish Council will work closely with all groups supplying childcare facilities in the village. The IWC, Social Services, local schools, the management committee of Steyne Park Community Centre, the Rural Community Council and local IWC Councillors will be included in all consultations. It recognises that childcare services offered in Bembridge should be of a high quality and available to all. Support and assistance will be given to those wishing to improve on the facilities we already have and help will be given with grant applications.

Partners:

Parish Council, IWC, Social Services, local schools, management committee of BYCC, IWRCC and local IWC Councillors.

8.3 Schools

The community is very fortunate in having so many children resident in Bembridge. The two schools in the area are excellent and both play important roles in the life of the village.

To keep this village the delightful place that it is, there must be a good balance of both young and old residents. To this end, children are encouraged to help the older, with many visiting the village's residential homes.

Pupils from both schools participated in Viewpoint Bembridge. Some were given disposable cameras to record their likes and dislikes of the village, a project that proved to be very interesting. Many of the children's photographs were used in the display, together with their comments. A pupil attending High School also played an active role on the committee ensuring the views of the youth were heard.

In the survey itself, 231 responders said they were very happy with the schools and only 12 said they were unhappy.

8.3.1 Bembridge Church of England Primary School

149 children are on the register with 19% from outside the catchment area. This is a very happy vibrant school and fared well in the Ofsted report being rated as 'good' and praised for the positive attitude the

children show in their work. There is also an excellent anti-bullying policy in place.

The swimming pool was in need of considerable repair and the parents together with the teachers managed to raise enough money this year for this to be done. They have formed a 'Swimming Pool Committee' and are looking to raise more funds to upgrade the pool and facilities with the view of opening it for public use – a result that will be of great benefit to the village. This is good example of schools playing a very important role in village life.

8.3.2 Forelands Middle School

214 children are on the register of Forelands Middle School, many of whom are outside the catchment area attending from both Ryde and Sandown. This school has built up an excellent record for teaching children with learning difficulties.

There are various 'after-school clubs' all very well attended except a homework club that is not quite so popular!

Results of the most recent Ofsted report were very satisfactory with the main criticism directed at the building, which is now being rectified.

The school was praised for its anti-bullying policy. It also has a pupil support unit comprising two adults so that children can go and talk to an adult with any problem, large or small. The Headmaster and the Chairman of Governors immediately deal with any complaints.

The school is rightfully proud of winning European International School Status. The head of foreign languages went to London to receive this award. French is taught in year 6, which is a year earlier than is usual on the mainland, and some pupils have even had the opportunity to learn some Japanese.

8.4 The Village Hall

The village hall is situated in the heart of the High Street and satisfies four requirements:

A centre for many of the village's societies and clubs which do not have their own premises.

A public meeting place for the village and Parish Council.

A meeting place for older residents.

The village provides a low-cost social hub for many activities and helps to engender community spirit. It also provides a centre for those who would otherwise be disadvantaged or socially excluded.

The hall was built in 1910 with monies raised by the villagers. The Parish Church donated the land on a peppercorn rent and the hall has been widely used ever since.

The Hall is available for 1,050 sessions a year; mornings, afternoons and evenings.

Findings from Viewpoint Bembridge showed that, apart from use by visitors and tourists, 27% of villagers use the Hall at least once a week, a further

17% use it at least once a month, and a 36% use it, but use it, but less often.

Interestingly, when villagers were asked whether they would be

concerned about the effect of different amenities closing, 89% said they would be very or slightly concerned about the effect on village life if the Village Hall were to close - third only to food shops and newsagents!

When asked in the survey whether the villagers would use the Hall even more if the facilities were improved, 79% they would.

Actions:

To support the refurbishment plans for the village hall drawn up by BVHMC.

Partners:

BVHMC, Bembridge Parish Council, residents and user groups.

8.5 Steyne Park

Steyne Park is regarded potentially as one of Bembridge's most valuable assets as the largest open space in the village. In answer to the specific question in the survey 'Would you use the facilities more often if...

... There was better lighting? Just under half of those with families with children under 16 said they would.

... There was a better children's playground? Nearly 70% cent of families said they would use this facility if improvements were made. The present playground is small and was built with funds raised by villagers and in particular young mothers. The present Parish Council has recognised the need to improve the facility to encourage families to use the area more. Any improvement would also benefit the Windmill Pre-School as a play area for their pupils during term time. Grant funding is being considered and a steering group will be formed of interested parties in the near future.

... The Bembridge Youth and Community Centre (BYCC) is refurbished? Again, those with children were in favour with 61.7% saying they would use the centre more. The centre is in need of renovation and repair and this was identified by the many that replied to the survey. Plans have already been drawn up for the refurbishment and grant applications are now with funders awaiting consideration. The present centre committee is planning to extend opening hours and activities.

... The BYCC is open on school holidays? 60% of respondents felt that it would be an asset to have the centre open during school holidays. Some parents asked if a before-school club could be held for those who work out of the village.

... The BYCC open more evenings? The general consensus was that residents would use the centre more with many saying they would go at least twice a week once the refurbishment has taken place.

8.5.1 Youth at Steyne Park

As the BYCC hold youth clubs twice a week and there is regular sports training held at Steyne Park the committee of Viewpoint Bembridge undertook a separate survey for the younger members of the Community.

Brownies: The Brownies seemed satisfied with everything the village offered. Everyone appreciated the village and how lucky they were to live here. The beach was a clear favourite along with the Primary School. Dislikes were the traffic congestion, dog mess on pavements and one young lady disliked one of the shops in particular!

Youth Club and Middle School: Respondents said they felt misunderstood sometimes by residents and those in authority, but on the whole were proud of their village. They asked for some items of equipment for the Youth Club – snooker cues, a decent television and other minor items that it will not be hard to fund. They would like the Youth Club open more often especially in the holidays. A late bus was also requested over the weekend to allow them to go the cinema in nearby towns.

There is a thriving Youth Football team run by volunteers from the village and every weekend as many as 60 young people can be found training and enjoying sports. The Parish Council is currently refurbishing the changing rooms, which in recent years have been neglected by the lessees.

Actions:

The Parish Council will continue to liaise with the BYCC and other interested parties to continue improvements to Steyne Park.

The Parish Council to provide assistance and support for DEFRA funding application.

The Parish Council to approach the IWRCC and Bembridge Partnership for funding opportunities and to form a steering committee of interested parties.

The Parish Council to keep villagers informed of plans for Steyne Park and improvements through the Parish Council Newsletter.

The Parish Council to support those wishing to improve and enhance sports facilities for children. Youth football at Steyne Park, run by a very enthusiastic band of villagers, has proved how much our young value these activities. Contact will be made with Sport England to discuss further opportunities in this area.

9 COMMUNITY SERVICES

9.1 Policing

Of those responding to the questionnaire, 30% were completely satisfied and a further 42% were slightly satisfied. 21% were dissatisfied with police cover and wanted a greater night-time police presence in trouble spots. The largest proportion of these was in the 75 plus age group, closely followed by the 25 to 54 age group.

Considering that 42% per cent of the village population is aged over 60, it is not surprising that older residents are least satisfied with police cover. Many of the older residents that replied do not venture out in the evenings, so their concept of 'non-policing' could be a misinterpretation. However, their views are valid and their fears must be addressed.

Young people in the village said there was a lack of understanding on the whole by the police of the problems that they have. "Nowhere to go, nothing to do" was a statement made by many of them and although this is not a policing problem, they felt that the police were moving them on all the time. This led to a lack of respect by the youngsters for authority and it is something that also needs to be addressed.

Neighbourhood Watch schemes did not appear to be working as well as they could be. It was recognised that lack of, or poor information to the Watch Co-ordinators was the likely cause.

Many residents do not report incidents of petty vandalism citing that the police are slow to or do not respond. This has led to several incidents at Steyne Park where property has been damaged where no reports have been made. Residents must be encouraged to report even the most petty of crimes to ensure that the village receives adequate policing.

Actions:

Arrange a meeting with the new head of the Island police and the village local beat officer to discuss any improvements that can be made both in the level of cover and response times to reports of problems.

Details of schemes that will help people make their homes and properties more secure will be advertised in the Parish Council Newsletter.

Encouragement will be given to both police and young people in the village to build good relationships and trust. Young people will be encouraged to become involved in community projects.

A close watch will be kept of Government initiatives that help communities become safer and happier environments. If it is thought that the village will benefit from these initiatives, applications for grants will be submitted or new powers exercised.

9.2 Healthcare Services

Most Bembridge residents use St Helens Medical Centre for their primary health needs. The practice also has a branch surgery based in Foreland Road. In the following findings, those using other surgeries and second homeowners appeared not to have answered the question. Taking this into account, the response rate of 81% is extremely high.

The findings must be considered against the background that the village has the largest proportion of older people than any other area on the Island. As people age, their health needs increase and in turn this puts pressure on services provided by the local Primary Care Trust (PCT) and those at the frontline of delivering services.

Not surprisingly, more surgery time was requested at Bembridge. Many residents said they found it difficult to get to St Helens as they did not drive or, because of age and infirmity, found public transport difficult to use. (See other findings under transport).

While 82% of respondents asked for more GP surgery time in the village, 70% requested more nurse-led surgeries. These high proportions suggest that there is a need for more surgeries to be held and this matter will be raised with the Primary Care Trust (PCT) highlighting the age and make up of our population, and of the increased numbers requiring medical facilities during the summer months.

More than half of those who responded said they would like more well-person and screening clinics. One respondent had never seen any clinics advertised and did not know whether they were available. Residents also highlighted diabetic clinics and Warfarin testing clinics as a need.

The biggest request (80%) was for blood tests to be available at St Helens surgery. Residents found it difficult to attend the clinics in Ryde or St. Mary's in Newport. In some cases patients had arrived at Ryde only to be told they were not undertaking any more tests in a particular session. One resident, who had moved from Cowes, asked why blood tests had been carried out on site at the Cowes surgery.

Action:

The issue of blood tests will be raised with the PCT and GPs to see if there is any possibility of offering this service to residents.

Raise the issue of more GP and nurse-led surgeries at Bembridge.

Partners:

St Helens Medical Centre, Primary Care Trust

9.3 Other Services

9.3.1 Public Conveniences

There has been general concern about the IWC shutting public toilets throughout the Island during winter months.

A total of 84% responded to the question of toilets in the village. Of these, more than 80% were unhappy about cleanliness of toilets and felt that they should be open throughout the winter.

The Cloisters: There was criticism about the cleanliness of the disabled toilet situated near the Cloisters. This toilet is available by the national RADAR key system

Steyne Park: The toilets in Steyne Park were highlighted as being poorly maintained. These particular toilets suffered from malicious damage on a frequent basis.

Lifeboat Station: The public conveniences at the Lifeboat Station were used heavily in the summer months and more frequent cleaning of the toilets was requested during the high season.

Forelands Beach: A number of residents highlighted the fact that there are no toilets at Foreland Beach and requested that this matter be addressed.

9.3.2 Refuse Collection and Street Cleaning

People were asked how satisfied they were with the Refuse Collection Service. Of those that answered, 71% stated that they were very satisfied and a further 27% were mostly satisfied with the Service. This gives an overall total of 98% of residents that are happy with this service. The company that undertakes this service should be congratulated on this remarkable result.

Street cleaning also rated quite favourably, with 41% being very satisfied and 43% being mainly satisfied.

9.3.3 Recycling

Although no specific questions were asked on the questionnaire relating to recycling, some people expressed concerns using the 'comments' section. Householders living in private drives and on some unmade roads do not have a door-to-door recycling service and have to take items to the nearest main road and collect their boxes later. This has implications for older and disabled residents. Bembridge therefore does not have complete coverage for the recycling of refuse items. This issue will be raised with local IWC Councillors and Island Waste.

9.3.4 Dog Bins

Out of 623 responses to the question regarding the need for more dog bins, 88% identified that more were needed. Some respondents questioned the siting of those dog bins already in place and the need for more frequent emptying of bins during the summer months. One mother who walks her children to school along Steyne Road commented on the amount of excrement left by dog-owners who did not clear up after their pets.

The Parish Council will look in to the matter and remind dog owners of their responsibilities in the parish newsletter. The feasibility of providing more bins, bearing in mind the annual cost of emptying each bin is approximately £150. Local companies and businesses will be approached with a view to sponsoring bins.

9.3.5 Drainage systems

Although this was not specifically covered in the questionnaire, a number of residents raised this as an issue, since over the last two years climate change has resulted in far wetter conditions. Most of the drains and sewers in the village are extremely old and not built to withstand the strain now placed upon them.

Residents were concerned about flooding, particularly in the Lane End area, during periods of heavy rain. This was because the drains had been unable to cope with the excess flow of water. One occurrence led to the closure of the Village Primary School when sewage escaped into the school.

There were also complaints about sewage smells around the area of the Lifeboat Station. This has been an on-going problem for a considerable time.

At the other end of the village, some residents in Kings Close have encountered sewage on their driveways and outside their front doors. Investigations proved that tree roots are blocking the sewer in Kings Road.

9.3.6 Ambulance Service

Responding to questions about the ambulance service, 75% of the over-55 age group stated they were satisfied, as were 69% in the age group 25-54. Although these figures are in the higher range of the spectrum, the Isle of Wight Primary Care Trust will be informed of the findings of the survey.

9.3.7 Fire Service

Bembridge is fortunate to have a fire appliance in the village manned by local volunteers. Between 80 and 85% of respondents across all age groups indicated their satisfaction with Fire Service cover. This result demonstrates the need for this vital service to be retained in the village.

Actions:

The Parish Council will address the problems of toilets at Steyne Park and refurbishment is planned.

The Parish Council to raise the lack of toilet facilities at Forelands Beach with the local IWC Councillor and also with relevant departments at County Hall.

The IWC, Council, both Council representatives for Bembridge and the cleaning contractor will be informed of these findings. Conveniences will be inspected at regular intervals and unacceptable standards will be reported to the correct authorities.

The Parish Council to review provision of dog bins.

The Parish Council to liaise with the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Police Authority regarding present and future arrangements for Police coverage.

The Parish Council to consult with Island Waste regarding the Recycling Scheme.

Partners:

IWC, Island Waste, Bembridge IW Councillors, Parish Council, Primary Care Trust, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Police Authority, Southern Water.

10 ACCESS TO INFORMATION

10.1 Improving Access to Information

During this consultation period, it was discovered that many people find it hard to access everyday information. Outside organisations should be encouraged to visit the village to hold outreach clinics on a regular basis.

However, the survey revealed that most people in Bembridge find it extremely easy to keep up with information about village events.

Most respondents stated that they read Village Talk in the local paper, and this was more prevalent among the 55 to 74 age group. Those over 75 read the Parish Magazine produced by the local churches. Notice boards and posters in shops were all mentioned frequently.

The award-winning internet-based site for the village – www.bembridge.com – was visited by 13 per cent of the population, a figure that is expected rise as older people learn how to use the Internet.

Some organisations already visit the village to give information and advice, or to service hearing apparatus. Discussions will take place with other voluntary sector groups on the Island so that a complete service is provided for villagers. There is currently a shortage of venues for these clinics, and discussions will be held with local business, churches and community groups and council establishments to provide appropriate meeting places.

Actions:

The Parish Council will approach the IWRCC and voluntary sector organisations to instigate improving access to information.

Villagers will also be encouraged to train as volunteers for local organisations such as Citizens Advice Bureau, Age Concern, RNIB and Sound Advice so that access to information within the village can be improved.

11 PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

11.1 Planning Survey

The questionnaire asked three specific questions on planning matters in Bembridge.

11.1.1 How satisfied were residents with the overall control of planning services provided by IWC?

Of those questioned, 86% answered and of these approximately half in the 25 to 74 age group said they were not satisfied with IWC Development Control. Another 25% of the same age group had no opinion. However for the 75+ age group, 34% were unhappy, with 37% having no opinion. Many people commenting on planning matters said that infill in the village was out of control and there was concern about the very few open spaces left within the village being built upon. Most felt that although the village was vibrant, especially during the summer months, the infrastructure could not support more development.

The recent development of flats in the harbour came in for much criticism from local people as being out of keeping with the local environment.

11.1.2 How satisfied were residents with the role of Bembridge Parish Council in the initial stages of planning control?

Results reflected those of question one. It must be pointed out that the Parish Council can only act in an advisory capacity as a statutory consultee in the planning process. This does not appear to be understood by those living in the village.

11.1.3 If there were to be more housing, what type would residents give priority?

Question three related to the future development within the village and it was to this question that villagers made most comments.

Some people have commented that this was a leading question as residents and those responding to the questionnaire were not given the choice of a box to indicate 'no more development'. A large percentage felt that the village could take no more development but that if it were needed, then affordable homes for young families from within the village took priority. This is because the combination of high house prices (Bembridge is one of the highest priced areas on the Isle of Wight) and the low wage structure on the island precluded younger residents from settling in Bembridge. Family homes were felt to be the next priority. Housing Association properties in the village were at the bottom of the list, mainly because residents felt that they were given to those from outside. Questions were also raised about the Local Housing Association and the allocation of such properties. One resident said that a property adjoining hers had stayed empty for months before being allocated.

There was also some concern about building taking place at Steyne Park, our only green site left within the village. A number of people suggested increasing the village envelope slightly to allow for building on the outskirts of the village rather than create unsightly and inappropriate infill.

90% of those answering felt that more second homes were inappropriate.

The Village Design Statement has covered actual restraints that the residents consider important. One of these is that houses considered to be houses of character should not be demolished to make way for future developments. It also proposes that all development should be in keeping with the environment and sympathetic to adjoining properties, taking into account other factors such as AONBs and SSSIs.

In summary, there is overall dissatisfaction with planning matters. Residents are concerned that if development is allowed to continue at the present rate, the village will change in structure and nature and they feel strongly that this should not be allowed to happen. Planning Authorities, although working towards Government guidelines, should look not only at the guidelines supplied by Government but also at the present infrastructure of the village and the views of its residents.

Actions:

Ensure that the IWC is taking into account the VDS when making Planning Decisions.

Parish Councillors and local IWC councillors to ensure that breaches of planning regulations or permissions are reported immediately and then followed up.

Parish Councillors should continue to be encouraged to attend training sessions on planning matters when they are available

Partners:

Bembridge Parish Council, IWC Councillors for Bembridge, IWC Development Control Department, BBA and other organisations (depending on planning applications).

12 MAKING IT HAPPEN

12.1 Making it happen

Many of the Plan's initiatives are beyond the direct control of the Parish Council but it has agreed to adopt the principles of the Plan as guidelines for progress.

Partners have been identified in the Action Points.

In many instances, representation has already started and actions have already been put in place. As examples, the village now has Broadband Internet coverage, yellow lines are being implemented at the High St and Foreland Road junction, and the Village Hall improvements will start in the spring.

However there is a need to maintain the impetus therefore the Action Points will be reviewed at six-monthly intervals.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank all the villagers of Bembridge, young and old, who took the time and trouble to complete the questionnaires and attend the exhibitions. Also:

www.bembridge.com, which has supported our efforts throughout by publishing reports and events on its website. We wish Sue and Brian Langford continued success with their award-winning site.

Richard Beet, who undertook the onerous task of editing the Plan document and all those others who assisted.

The Village Hall Committee and the Methodist Church who kindly allowed us to hold our exhibitions on their premises.

Notes Copies of the Village Design Statement can be found in the Library or purchased from the Clerk to the Parish Council.

The above findings reflect the views of residents and are not those of any other body.