Introduction

Village Plans were initiated by Central Government as a way for rural communities to express their views and aspirations and to become more involved in the planning and development of local services. In the autumn of 2011 a parish meeting was held under the auspices of Shiplake Parish Council and it was agreed to set up an independent Steering Group to identify the views and wishes of all residents on local matters and to prepare a plan with the aim of addressing the issues raised.

Plan Objectives
The principal objective of the plan is to maintain and improve the quality of life in the villages of Shiplake. Through a comprehensive consultation process the plan tries to reflect the concerns and wishes of the majority of residents.

The plan aims to be realistic, recognising existing services and avoiding objectives that are unachievable due to lack of resources and funding. That said, the Steering Group although not wishing to raise unrealistic expectations, thought it right to pursue the issues raised by the community.

Where objectives are established the Plan aims to have clear, prioritised and practical recommendations as to how they can be achieved.

As the plan has developed it has become clear that it is really only the start of the process, especially for those projects with longer timescales for implementation. The fulfilment of many of the recommendations in this report will only be achieved through a carefully coordinated effort involving the Parish Council and independent Project Teams set up to deliver specific objectives.

One of the successes of this plan has been the breadth of involvement of the residents of Shiplake and that continued engagement will be paramount if we are to see the plans proposals implemented.

A copy of the Report will be distributed to every household in Shiplake. Additional copies will be available at the Corner Shop and can be viewed at the village web site www.shiplakevillages.com
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A Brief History

Shiplake Cross and Lower Shiplake are located in South Oxfordshire, two miles south of Henley on Thames. The Parish extends from the banks of the river Thames across the A4155 up to its boundaries with Binfield Heath Parish and Harpsden Parish.

It is a two village parish. The oldest part is the area known as the village of Shiplake Cross. It is close to the parish church of St. Peter and Paul, Shiplake College (formerly Shiplake Court and farm), the local primary school and the Plowden Arms pub.

The name Shiplake most likely stems from 'stream where sheep are washed '(sheeplake) but it has also been suggested that it could be named after the final resting place of a Viking ship (ship loss) as the river was too shallow to navigate above Shiplake.

In the Domesday book(1086) it was part of the 'Binfield Hundred' and the area named as Lysbrook, later Lachebroc (a sluggish stream) and Bolchede, later Bolney. The Lashbrook and Bolney names still exist today in street names.

According to tithe records, the Church of Saints Peter and Paul dates from at least the 12th century. Major restoration work took place in 1822 and in 1869 the chancel, north aisle and parts of the south aisle were rebuilt. Alfred Lord Tennyson married a cousin of the vicar's wife, Emily Mary Sellwood, here in June 1850.

It is likely that the Lashbrook Chapel building was originally the store for the nearby paper mill. The mill closed in 1907. In June 1914 the store was referred to as the Parish room and daily services were held here. The last service at the chapel was held on 27th October 2002.

Shiplake Court dates back to the 12th Century, but was rebuilt in the 14th Century by the Englefield family. Sir Francis Englefield had to give up residence in 1563, however, as he refused to return from the Spanish Netherlands where he had fled to avoid religious persecution.

The Plowden family took it over until 1691 when they sold it to pay for their son to get a commission in the army of King James I. It passed through many other landowners, notably Henry Constantine Jennings. It was rebuilt in 1905, finally becoming Shiplake College in 1958.
There is evidence that some of the timbers of the Plowden Arms public house date back to the 1600s and that it was an ale house as far back as 1749. It was originally called The Plow, then the Plough Inn and then The Plough Hotel before the name was changed to the Plowden Arms in the 1930s by owners Brakspear. In the 1800s it was the location of dinners following Parish meetings. In 1853 the parishioners discussed the proposal for the Henley branch railway line. Isambard Kingdom Brunel is likely to have been present at such dinners.

Memorial Hall Dedication

Shiplake Memorial Hall, a focus for local activities for the last 90 years, was funded by a Mr Mardon in memory of his son killed in the First World War. It was used as a temporary classroom for evacuees from London during World War Two, as the local primary school was not big enough. In 2013 a complete remodernisation was undertaken costing £450,000 (almost the same as it cost to build the original).

Education in Shiplake Parish, has a long history. The primary school saw its origins in the Mission school 'for the education of the poor' in Shiplake Parish, which was built in 1847 where two roads crossed in Binfield Heath. A new school, known as the Victorian school, was built at Shiplake Cross in 1870, but by the 1950s this school was in poor repair and failed to meet Education Department standards. A third school with two classrooms was built next to it in 1963. The Victorian school was then demolished to provide the school playground. Since then there have been numerous extensions until the current school has seven classrooms, including the ARK – a fully equipped technology and music facility.

Economic and Social History

Up until the 19th century the area was characterised by the larger houses such as Shiplake Court, Shiplake House, the church and a few farmhouses and workers cottages. The Phillimore, Plowden, Harrison, Jennings, and Baskerville families all providing employment to local people as farm labourers or servants.

Improvements to transport links aided the economic and social development of the area and especially Lower Shiplake.

In 1773 the Thames Navigation Commission built Shiplake Lock on the Thames about 800m downriver from the original village. This allowed improved access to the paper mill located close by. In the 1880s the mill provided important employment opportunities in the village as 27 men worked a 24 hour day in two 12 hour shifts.
The Wargrave and Shiplake Regatta was founded in 1867 and is now held annually. Whilst the first Regatta had a mere seven events raced over an afternoon today there are over 330 events on a two day programme.

In 1769 the A4155 turnpike road was built, providing a direct route from Reading through Shiplake to Henley and thence to Oxford. Previously there were two minor roads that crossed close to Coppid Hall, from Reading through Emmer Green to Henley and from Shiplake Mill, past the Church and across the heath to Shiplake Bottom. With the opening of the Henley Railway branch line in 1857 the improved transport links were complete.

The railway transformed Lower Shiplake. The Bolney and Lashbrook estates were sold and the land developed for housing. The Bolney estate had previously provided moorings for houseboats alongside the river, and several of the houses in Bolney Road retained the name of the original houseboat. Housing in Lower Shiplake was bought by commuters to London as the railway provided a good route.

According to the trade directory for 1936 there was a grocer, two coal merchants, a dairyman and riding stables, shop and sub-post office, a plumber, an off-licence, a garage, a newsagent, two boat builders and boat repairers, and two market gardens (one for bulbs). A policeman, a stationmaster and a lockkeeper all lived in the village. The Baskerville Arms was built after this date on the site of the huge village store which had burned down.

Post War Expansion

Between 1960 and 2013 more than 170 new houses were built in the villages. Part of the Baskerville estate was developed into Badgers Walk/Brocks Way, and the horticultural fields off Northfield Avenue into Manor Wood Gate and Brampton Chase.

Lower Shiplake is where the 'commercial centre' of the parish is located. Unlike many rural villages the parish still boasts many amenities including two pubs, a shop and post office, a butcher, a garage, a church, a school, a nursery and good bus and rail links.

The community partakes in a wealth of activities, clubs and societies, including the Shiplake Village Community Club, the Women’s Institute, the Rosemary Club, Cubs, Scouts and Beavers. Three tennis courts with floodlights and a bowling green are regularly used by club members. A youth football club plays on the Memorial Hall fields.
This whole enterprise started with a meeting called by the Parish Council in September 2011. The residents at that meeting elected a chairman and a number of parishioners made themselves available to serve on a steering group that was formed shortly afterwards.

Building on the experience of other villages in South Oxfordshire which had already developed a village plan, the steering group set about constructing an initial survey with the simple objective of trying to understand what the residents thought about their abode. The survey was free-form and asked three questions:

- What do you like about Shiplake?
- What do you dislike about Shiplake?
- What improvements would you like to see?

The initial survey took place in October 2012 and input was received from 450 dwellings, a return rate of 65%. A detailed analysis of these returns enabled the steering group to identify the top eleven issues (matters raised by at least 10% of respondents) that were of concern to residents and it was these issues that formed the basis of the main survey.

The actual number of dwellings surveyed in 2012/2013 amounted to approximately 690 and any results contained in those reports reflect that population. Early on in the survey process it was decided to include in the survey residents who live in parts of Northfield Avenue, Bolney Road and Manor Wood Gate which are, boundary wise, in the parish of Harpsden.

It is worth noting that a survey of this type is a moving feast. A number of issues raised in the initial survey did not make it to the main survey as they were already under consideration. A good example is safety at the level crossing in Lower Shiplake, where the Parish Council were already in negotiations with Network Rail and barriers were installed before the main survey took place.

A great deal of effort went into compiling the main survey questionnaire and advice was taken from Oxfordshire Rural Community Council (ORCC), South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC) and Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) before the final document was put before the residents in April 2013. A small army of volunteers helped distribute and collect the survey forms house by house and a very creditable return rate of 78% was achieved. In total 836 survey forms were returned which amounted to 75% of the questionnaires actually distributed.

Not only was it important to maximise the return rate from the survey, it was also essential to ensure that we had a representative return across the two villages. There are approximately 630 dwellings in the parishes of Lower Shiplake and Shiplake Cross. According to the electoral role about 80% of electors live in Lower Shiplake and 20% in Shiplake Cross. The survey returns when analysed by post code reflect a similar split which suggests that spread of returns in the survey is consistent with what we have on the ground.

The survey was structured in a machine-readable format and the data processing of the survey was undertaken by SODC. Regarding the topics identified by the residents we now have a comprehensive view of what residents think and the top line results were shared with parishioners at the Annual Parish Meeting held in May 2013.

Since May, project teams have been further analysing the results of the main survey and developing proposals - this report is a distillation of their findings.

It should be noted that documentation relating to surveys, presentations and this report can be found at [www.shiplakevillages.com](http://www.shiplakevillages.com). Progress on the plan implementation will also be posted on the web site.
The Parish of Shiplake (The survey area included houses in Bolney Road, Northfield Avenue and Manor Wood Gate, currently in the Parish of Harpsden)
A Comparative Profile of the Villages

In the lead up to the millennium (2000) a project was undertaken to record a snapshot of the villages. At that time a detailed survey of residents’ views and aspirations was carried out and the results were published in the booklet ‘Life in Our Villages Past and Present’.

Some comparison is possible between the findings of the millennium survey and the plan survey. It reveals some interesting results, but it must however be born in mind that a direct comparison cannot be made as the two surveys were very different in many of the questions asked. The participation rate was however very good. It rose from 65% in 2000 to 75% in 2013.

The gender balance has remained largely unchanged with females accounting for 51% of the population and males 49%. Age distribution was also similar with the bulk of residents falling in the 40-65 year age group.

Regarding tenure, it is difficult to make exact comparisons between now and 2000. Different age bands were used between the two surveys but suffice it to say that people must like Shiplake, the proportion of long established residents has increased from 48% in 2000 to well over 50% in 2013.

A reliable comparison of employment trends is again difficult due to subtle differences in the way questions were asked between now and 2000. On balance it would appear that a smaller proportion of people are now in gainful employment with a commensurate rise in the number of retired people in our villages.
Working from home appears to be on the increase. In 2000 13% of those surveyed said that home was their main place of work or study. In the 2013 survey the question was more directly focused on work and the comparative distribution is shown below.

Now as many as 11% of those in employment appeared to work almost full time from home and a further 32% spend a week or more each month working from home. Broadband is the conduit that makes working from home a possibility which highlights the need for a better service in our villages.

Many of the issues raised in the 2000 survey reappeared in 2013.

Maintenance of roads, paths and drains was an issue in 2000. 53% were unsatisfied with the general state of roads. 67% identified 'danger spots' and it was suggested that a Hazard Group be formed. This did not happen. 20% of households reported a problem concerning inconsiderate parking.

As far as traffic calming went in 2000 52% said that current speed limits should be better enforced, 34% asked for speed humps to be installed and 35% for additional speed cameras. Speed humps are now in place in Station Road.

In 2000 it was a 50/50 split as to whether additional street lighting be installed at Shiplake Cross, but only 39% wanted more lights in Lower Shiplake.

When asked the overriding question 'what would make life better?' in 2000 the largest proportion voted for an increase and improvements in footpaths and cycle ways with 60% wanting a cycle path to Henley and 55% wanting a footbridge to Wargrave.

Other ideas included:
- A new playground in Badgers Walk (53%)
- Improved communications (42%)
- More village events (43%)
- A boating club (30%)

Four ideas put forward in 2000 have actually come into effect. There is now a Local History Group that meets regularly (identified by 35% of respondents), a garden club (33%), a village website (25%) and the Shiplake Village Community Club has many events to be involved in.

Then residents got their information on local events from the Henley Standard (85%), local notice boards (13%) but only 6% read the Parish Council Reports. A website was not available then.

In 2000 39% felt that no extra housing was needed, but if any were to be provided this should be for the young people of local families, those on low incomes and the elderly.

Of the residents surveyed in 2000 56% saw dog fouling as an issue and wanted steps taken to reduce it. Dog walkers were asked if they would use dog bins should they be provided. 76% said yes. (9% said no and 15% said they did not know)

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The 2013 Main Results

While this report is mainly concerned with the areas of improvement that residents would like to see, it would be wrong to leave the impression that the community is dissatisfied with the villages of Shiplake. Indeed the reverse is true. Over two thirds commented on the quiet environment, rural location and access to the river and countryside. A similar number highlighted the importance of local businesses including the corner shop, butcher, garage and pubs. The station and local transport was also mentioned by many as was community spirit and friendly atmosphere. So what follows is about how we build on these strengths rather than the need to correct failings.

The top eleven issues that emerged from the initial survey and explored in more detail in the main survey are shown below. The main survey had effectively two ranking questions:

1. How important is this matter to you?
2. How do you rate this matter if you had to prioritise three issues from eleven?

While all of the issues were seen as important in their own right it was clear that if residents were asked to prioritise, some issues received much greater weighting than others.

The ranking below is based on the number of residents who placed the issues in their top three priorities for further attention.

Due to differences in methodology comparing the results of the two surveys is not simple. The initial survey was free-form inviting residents to identify the issues they wanted to be addressed while the main survey asked residents to respond to specific questions. The table below compares the prioritisation of issues in the main survey with the frequency with which the issue was raised in the initial survey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Main Survey</th>
<th>Initial Survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Road Maintenance</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved Broadband</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parking</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paths &amp; Cycleways</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traffic Calming</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Bus &amp; Rail</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing &amp; Development</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dog Fouling</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Street Lighting</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
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<td>Community Facilities</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Activities</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparing the results from the two surveys the top five remain the same, although Improved Broadband has moved up from number five to number two in the residents’ prioritisation of issues. Housing & Development ranked seventh in the main survey but could well become more prominent in the near future with the recent application to build houses on the Thames Farm Site.

The following chapters describe each of these topics in more detail and discuss possible solutions.